



IBN WARRAQ • The Literary Evidence for Islam

free inquiry

Celebrating Reason and Humanity October/November 2006 Vol. 26 No. 6

HUMANISM AND THE SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS

- Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
- Paul Kurtz
- James Gouinlock
- Ken Livingston
- Jonathan Haidt

Arthur Caplan • Peter Singer
Barbara Smoker • Nat Hentoff
Shadia Drury • R. Joseph Hoffmann

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THE AFFIRMATIONS OF HUMANISM: A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES*



We are committed to the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human problems.

We deplore efforts to denigrate human intelligence, to seek to explain the world in supernatural terms, and to look outside nature for salvation.

We believe that scientific discovery and technology can contribute to the betterment of human life.

We believe in an open and pluralistic society and that democracy is the best guarantee of protecting human rights from authoritarian elites and repressive majorities.

We are committed to the principle of the separation of church and state.

We cultivate the arts of negotiation and compromise as a means of resolving differences and achieving mutual understanding.

We are concerned with securing justice and fairness in society and with eliminating discrimination and intolerance.

We believe in supporting the disadvantaged and the handicapped so that they will be able to help themselves.

We attempt to transcend divisive parochial loyalties based on race, religion, gender, nationality, creed, class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, and strive to work together for the common good of humanity.

We want to protect and enhance the earth, to preserve it for future generations, and to avoid inflicting needless suffering on other species.

We believe in enjoying life here and now and in developing our creative talents to their fullest.

We believe in the cultivation of moral excellence.

We respect the right to privacy. Mature adults should be allowed to fulfill their aspirations, to express their sexual preferences, to exercise reproductive freedom, to have access to comprehensive and informed health-care, and to die with dignity.

We believe in the common moral decencies: altruism, integrity, honesty, truthfulness, responsibility. Humanist ethics is amenable to critical, rational guidance. There are normative standards that we discover together. Moral principles are tested by their consequences.

We are deeply concerned with the moral education of our children. We want to nourish reason and compassion.

We are engaged by the arts no less than by the sciences.

We are citizens of the universe and are excited by discoveries still to be made in the cosmos.

We are skeptical of untested claims to knowledge, and we are open to novel ideas and seek new departures in our thinking.

We affirm humanism as a realistic alternative to theologies of despair and ideologies of violence and as a source of rich personal significance and genuine satisfaction in the service to others.

We believe in optimism rather than pessimism, hope rather than despair, learning in the place of dogma, truth instead of ignorance, joy rather than guilt or sin, tolerance in the place of fear, love instead of hatred, compassion over selfishness, beauty instead of ugliness, and reason rather than blind faith or irrationality.

We believe in the fullest realization of the best and noblest that we are capable of as human beings.

*by Paul Kurtz

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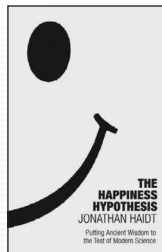
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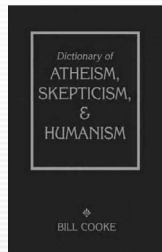
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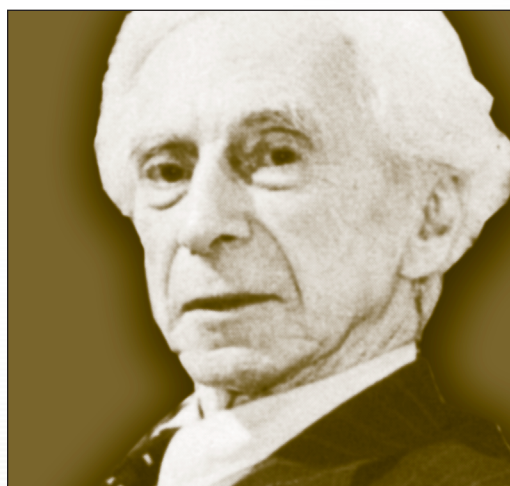
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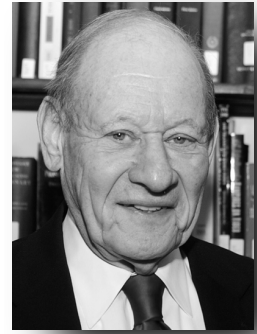
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EDITORIAL PAUL KURTZ



The Principles of Fairness: Progressive Taxation

We believe in the fullest realization of the best and noblest
that we are capable of as human beings.

—*The Affirmations of Humanism: A Statement of
Principles*

Secular humanism traces its origins back to the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the democratic revolutions of the modern world. As such, secular humanists have espoused a distinctive set of ethical values and principles, seeking to secularize human values and to emancipate individuals from repressive ideologies and theologies. The word *secular* qualifies *humanism*, because we are skeptical of traditional faith in God and salvation and are nonreligious. But we cannot be defined simply by our unbelief. We accept a naturalistic, evolutionary worldview, for it is based upon evidence and has been tested by the methods of science. The term *humanist ethics* helps to define who and what we are. Clearly, we believe in “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” In ethical terms, this means the right of individuals to realize their own interests and aspirations on their own terms, so long as they do not harm others or prevent those people from pursuing their interests and aspirations. It is hoped that this will mean the achievement of some measure of excellence in their personal lives. Humanist ethics commits us to beliefs in the autonomy of choice and the right of privacy, consonant with the constraints of the public order and the duly enacted laws. We are committed to the civic virtues of democracy. This entails tolerance for diversity in personal tastes, beliefs, and lifestyles.

Secular humanists are also concerned with maximizing the common good for the widest number of individuals within a democratic

Paul Kurtz is the editor of Free Inquiry, a professor emeritus of philosophy at the University at Buffalo, and Chairman of the Center for Inquiry/Transnational.

framework. I am not here defending a utilitarian ethical theory in the sense that the common good is the ultimate criterion of moral choice. I think that there are many principles and values that we consider in making choices, but the common good is surely a vital element.

I submit that there is a key principle of fairness related to the common good that is being eroded and that needs to be defended anew. I am here referring to progressive taxation, which I would justify on humanist ethical grounds.

I have long argued that the secular humanist movement should not take political positions *per se*. As individuals, we can disagree about candidates and party platforms. However, certain ethical principles are central to secular humanism; and, if humanists do not take some concrete actions, then we risk the danger of engaging in purely abstract prattle, with no practical consequences.

I am sure that our libertarian readers will kick up a storm of protest against my support of progressive taxation. This issue is not simply economic or political; it is primarily ethical. It is based on the principle that all individuals in a democratic society ought to be considered equal in dignity and value and, hence, entitled to

“ . . . there is a key principle of fairness related to the common good that is being eroded and that needs to be defended anew. I am here referring to progressive taxation, which I would justify on humanist ethical grounds.”

equality of consideration. Every child is included, no matter what his or her racial, ethnic, religious, or class background; the son or daughter of the poor person as well as that of the rich; the disadvantaged as well as the advantaged. The democratic ethic holds that every individual should have an opportunity to realize his or her potentialities in society—the best and noblest of which each is capable. This presupposes an open society that affords some recognition and reward for merit. Every child is entitled to have access to education, proper nutrition, and good health care, even if his or her parents lack an adequate income.

A system of progressive taxation has now been instituted in virtually every democratic country of the world. Democratically elected governments have the right to exact taxation, and the tax rates ought to be graduated; that is, the wealthy classes ought to be taxed proportionally more than the working classes. These tax revenues should be applied for the common good, providing a level playing field for all sectors of society. Unfortunately, the concept of progressive taxation is progressively being whittled away, especially where extreme laissez-faire attitudes dominate.

A disturbing development is that in the United States an increasingly polarized society is taking form, with wide disparities in income and wealth among residents and a concomitant reduction in the capacity of the middle class to maintain its standard of living.

The income tax was enacted in the early part of the twentieth

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The Council for Secular Humanism cultivates rational inquiry, ethical values, and human development through the advancement of secular humanism. To carry out these objectives, the Council sponsors publications and programs, and organizes meetings and other group activities.



century. Rates at first were low, but they were gradually increased so that, by the time of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and during the Eisenhower years, the top rates reached 91 percent, clearly confiscatory.

The reverse situation now seems to prevail. The trend today is to reduce taxes for the wealthy. Thus, income earned from dividends and capital gains are taxed at only 15 percent (no doubt to bolster the stock markets), whereas income earned from a job or profession is taxed at higher rates, depending on income. There is also a concerted effort to get rid of estate taxes—misnamed “death taxes”—and either reduce the rates significantly or entirely repeal them.

Conservatives argue that reduced taxes stimulate the growth of the gross national product and thereby increase general prosperity. There is another index that ought to be applied in judging the viability of an economic-political system, and that is the *quality of life of the society and how widely it is shared*. The principle of fairness states that, in an affluent society, no citizen should have his or her basic economic, health, and cultural needs denied; there ought to be a floor in the income available for everybody in society. This is particularly the case in a situation where huge fortunes are being amassed.

The current effort to repeal the estate tax is puzzling. It is said that to tax an estate is to tax income twice. But this argument makes little sense, particularly since dividends and capital gains, which contribute significantly to wealth, have lower tax rates. Given compound-

ed interest rates, the growth of huge fortunes is accelerating. If this process continues, we are likely to see the emergence of an entrenched plutocracy, which is bound to have a deleterious effect on the common good by corrupting the electoral process and the political system. Special-interest lobbying could distort the legislative agenda and exacerbate gross inequalities in income and wealth.

The conservative complains about the abuses of the system, especially “welfare cheats,” because the benefits that are delivered to such people are unearned. But, we may ask, in what sense is the income and wealth of the heirs of vast family estates *earned* by them, when they may not have been involved in the building of the fortune? Why should earned income—from a job or profession—be taxed at a higher rate than unearned income in the form of dividends, capital gains, or reduced estate taxes? Where is the fairness in such a system of taxation?

Many huge fortunes may have been amassed due to luck or chance and not the innovation of the individuals who acquired them. Winners of lotteries and speculators in stocks and real estate may not necessarily possess the special acumen of entrepreneurs. I grant that some individuals do contribute extraordinarily to social wealth and that incentives are a powerful stimulus to their efforts. They should be rewarded. But not everyone who strikes it rich earned his or her bonanza by contributing to the wealth of society.

A system of progressive taxation allows for modestly graduated higher

rates that are not confiscatory. As a matter of fact, a compromise bill before the Congress exempted estates up to \$4 million from taxation. Progressive taxation provides some redress of inequities in society while allowing a substantial portion of the value of estates to be passed on. We must not allow greed to outweigh all other considerations. Should it not be balanced with the principles of equity?

Those who would deny any principles of fairness believe that evangelical capitalism is the savior of society, almost “the hand of God,” rewarding the devout and virtuous. Granted that the role of free-market incentives is essential for expanding the economy, but the private sector may not be able to satisfy all of the needs of society. Although philanthropy sometimes helps to fill the gaps, it may not be enough. Hence, there ought to be room for public support when the private sector is unable to fulfill vital social needs.

A functioning democratic society is one in which citizens in all sectors can enjoy the fruits of their labor. This is the basic principle of progressive taxation. Unfortunately, America has been overwhelmed by the mantra that the enemy is always the government or the state. Any effort to assist the disadvantaged is opposed. Thus, there is great reluctance to increase the minimum wage, even though its real value has declined 20 percent in the last decade. Forty-four million Americans still do not have health insurance. At the same time, great fortunes have grown exponentially.

Added to this is the misery caused when an industry outsources jobs, decides to leave an area, or insists that wages and benefits be drastically cut (as at Delphi and General Motors). The first casualties are working- and middle-class Americans, not top executives. Before this recourse is taken, in my view, there ought to be a limit on golden parachutes and a cap on the salaries of corporate leaders, particularly when the survival of an industry is endangered. Moreover, there need to be massive private and public efforts to retrain workers for new jobs.

Progressive taxation is a principle that we can defend on rational humanist ethical grounds and in terms of fairness. It is essential to maintain it if our democratic institutions are to survive and flourish. ■■

New Center for Inquiry Opens in the Nation's Capital

We are pleased to announce that a fifth Center for Inquiry has been opened in the United States in Washington, D.C. Most significantly, it is the headquarters of a new Office of Public Policy. This office will seek to defend the integrity of science and the secular principles intrinsic to the First Amendment. It will seek to identify sympathetic legislators, provide wherever possible expert testimony in congressional hearings, evaluate new legislative proposals, hold press conferences, produce and publish white papers, and submit *amicus* briefs in relevant federal court cases. This lobbying effort marks a significant new departure for the Center for Inquiry in its effort to convey to the public an appreciation of secular humanism and its commitment to the democratic process.

Second Latin-American Congress Held in Peru

I recently returned from Lima, Peru, where the Center for Inquiry/Transnational cosponsored the Second Ibero-American Congress. The first was held last year in Argentina. Norm Allen, co-director of Transnational Programs, and other members of the staff accompanied me to the congress, which was held at San Marcos University, an institution that was founded in 1512 and is considered to be the oldest university in the Western Hemisphere.

I am sure that readers of this magazine are well aware how the Spanish conquistadors, led by Francisco Pizarro, in search of gold, brutally vanquished the great Inca civilization that they found. A repressive Roman Catholic Church has reigned since in Peru and other South American societies, though many countries were liberated from the Spanish yoke in the nineteenth century by such men as San Martin and Simón Bolívar.

I am pleased to say that there are now two South American Centers for Inquiry—in Buenos Aires and Lima;

and there are great plans for future development. The Center for Inquiry in Amherst publishes the Spanish-language magazine, *Pensar (To Think)*, which is distributed throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Editors from some twelve countries make up its editorial board. The leaders of the congress declared their support for our endeavors and have issued a declaration defending secularism and science and calling for the development of additional Centers and Communities throughout Latin America. **ff**

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Attendees must make own travel and lodging arrangements. Major airports nearest to UC Davis are at Sacramento (closest) and San Francisco. Airport shuttle service is available; for details and reservations, visit www.davisairporter.com or call 1-800-565-5153. Discount accommodations are available at Hallmark Inn, 1-800-753-0035 (www.hallmarkinn.com). Mention "CSER" to obtain \$89 per-night rate. Accommodations are also available at Aggie Inn (530-756-0352) and Palm Court Suites (530-753-7100).

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Pop Icon, Humanist

An Interview with Björn Ulvaeus

Björn Ulvaeus is known worldwide as one of the four members of the Swedish pop super-group ABBA. With fellow ABBA member Benny Andersson, he wrote the musicals Chess, Kristina, and the current international hit, Mamma Mia!, based on ABBA songs. Less well known—outside Sweden, anyway—is the fact that Ulvaeus is an outspoken secular humanist. He is interviewed for FREE INQUIRY by Christer Sturmark, Chair of the Swedish Humanist Association, to which Ulvaeus belongs.

“I would like to say I’m a freethinker, a better word than both *agnostic* and *atheist*.”

FREE INQUIRY: Why have you chosen to commit yourself to humanist issues?

BJÖRN ULVAEUS: Religion is becoming a power in politics and is also competing with the scientific way of thinking. That worries me. I miss the days when people believed in science and common sense, as they did in the 1950s and 1960s. Now, fundamentalism and contempt for science seem to be spreading. I believe religion should be totally separated from the state. That’s not the way it is today, not even in Sweden. For hundreds of years, we have struggled to achieve a secular society, and now we seem to be going backwards.

FI: What went wrong?

ULVAEUS: Science hasn’t been able to solve our most basic problems, for example, environmental pollution or the crisis of HIV/AIDS. People are disap-

pointed with science when the answers we need are not delivered. As far as religious fundamentalism is concerned, it might be due to globalization and the insecurity many people feel in a world that is rapidly changing. In a crisis of identity, people often turn back to their religious roots.

FI: Are you an atheist?

ULVAEUS: I’m an agnostic leaning toward atheism. I do not believe in the god described in the Middle Eastern religions or in any other religions, for that matter. I’m not denying that there is something out there, but I don’t think that we should try to explain and understand what it might be. I would like to say I’m a freethinker, a better word than both *agnostic* and *atheist*. Maybe it should be reintroduced in our modern vocabulary.

FI: Where is the dividing line between the individual’s freedom of religion and society’s principles concerning freedom of speech and human rights?

ULVAEUS: I’m tired of giving respect to delusions and crazy ideas just because they are regarded as religious. Private faith must of course be respected, but it can’t be allowed to influence society. I think it’s important that you should be able to criticize and analyze religions, the same way that you can criticize opinions and values. Religious people must be able to cope with that! Some values must be universal, like human rights and the equal worth of every human being. That means that the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights must always be first in line before religion or other cultural habits, in case of any conflict between them.

FI: In the Swedish translation of the musical *Mamma Mia!* in the song, “Thank You for the Music” (in Swedish, “Tack för alla sånger”), you added a dissociation from religion. The original English refrain reads, in part:

“I believe religion should be totally separated from the state. That’s not the way it is today, not even in Sweden.

For hundreds of years, we have struggled to achieve a secular society, and now we seem to be going backwards.”

Thank you for the music
The songs I’m singing
Thanks for all the joy
They’re bringing
Who can live without it
I ask in all honesty
What would life be?

Translated back into English, your new Swedish lyrics read, “. . . thanks for all the songs, words and tunes, who needs religion? We can do without that, but imagine if music didn’t exist, not anywhere.” Did you intend to send a message?

ULVAEUS: I thought we could do what John Lennon did in “Imagine” and sneak in a statement. “Imagine” is sung in churches and nobody objects to the wish for “no religion too.” I wrote the Swedish version of “Thank You for the Music” with Niklas Strömstedt, and we were both prepared for strong reactions. But not one single complaint has been made! **FI**

Christer Sturmark is the chair of the Swedish Humanist Association, the editor of Humanisten, the Swedish humanist magazine, and an author, lecturer, and entrepreneur. His new book on the philosophical foundations of secular humanism, Tro och vetande 2.0 (Faith and Knowledge 2.0), features a foreword by Björn Ulvaeus. A longer version of this interview appeared in Humanisten (December 2005) and was translated into English by Marika Granerus.



Providing Alternatives to Religion

Paul Kurtz's noble goal that he describes in "Creating Secular and Humanist Alternatives to Religion" (*FI*, August/September 2006) has interested me for some time. The six conditions that Kurtz lists are possessed only by the choir, not, unfortunately, by those who need to benefit from them. We are talking freedom of the psyche here, and that freedom will only come through *proper* education and through an educational process that *must* be divorced from the moribund fears and parochial attitudes of the citizenry.

Evolutionary science must be *fearlessly* taught, as well as comparative religion and philosophy. Secular humanism must be presented as a viable and satisfying mainstream philosophy of life. Carl Sagan's best-seller, *The Demon-Haunted World*, is a comprehensive effort that should be taught as a primer early in high school. His *Cosmos* series on PBS should be replicated for other fields, so scientists can promote their visions to the intellectually starved laity.

How do you jump start a populace entranced with superstition and pseudoscience? I suggest launching a new "Reformation" and posting a list of grievances like those that appear on our Web site, www.atheiststation.org, on the World Peace page. It's hardly a murmur

in the chaos, but maybe some catalyst will bring it into more play (similar to what brought down the Mayan priest class). Finally, we need more atheists like Ian McEwan and more movies like *The Sandpiper* and *Chocolat*.

Ron Stauffer
Altoona, Pennsylvania

Ironically, in trying to illustrate the power of memes, Paul Kurtz has fallen victim to one. I refer, of course, to the "Ring Around the Rosy" explanation he recounts in "Creating Secular Humanist Alternatives to Religion." I recognized it at once as a pesky, resilient urban legend. The analysis by Barbara and David P. Mikkelsen of this legend [suggesting that the rhyme originated centuries after the Black Death swept through Europe and that it has nothing to do with the plague] can be found at <http://www.snopes.com/language/literary/rosie.htm>.

It just goes to prove that, no matter how brilliant, knowledgeable, and skeptical we may be, powerful memes can trip us up, and we must constantly ask ourselves not only what we know, but how we know it to be true.

Christine H. McCann
Cary, North Carolina

How Humanism Can Grow

I read Vern Bullough's article, "New Ways to Grow" (*FI*, June/July 2006), with a great deal of interest. I am a secular humanist who has been in prison for several years. While seeking an education (I now have a master's degree in philosophy), I managed to shake off the myopic, intolerant Southern Baptist mindset I was steeped in while growing up.

When a person finds herself or himself in prison, the initial reaction is to find something distracting or mind-numbing to escape the brutal reality of the environment and, for many people, to find some meaning to one's life. The overwhelming majority turns to religion. The chapels in prisons are full. It is my belief that the perpetuation of religious myths gives prisoners a false foundation in trying to rebuild already damaged psyches.

Only through the development of sound thinking skills can recidivism be curtailed. For a social contract to be adhered to, understanding that contract is helpful.

Prisoners are surely a population in need of insight into the real world. This article asked for ways to support the growth of secular humanism; I suggest supporting education in prison. The end result would be more secular humanists, a reduction in recidivism, and more human beings leading productive, meaningful lives.

Edward King
Airway Heights, Washington

End-of-Life Issues

For physicians who "know" irreversible clinical states, Nat Hentoff has intervened to render lay readers unnecessarily anxious about such patients ("Who Will Decide You Should Die?," *FI*, August/September 2006). Taken in proper context, Tom Flynn's statements that Hentoff refers to had reflected states of incurable pathology, causing agony that fully cognizant patients may choose to end. But Hentoff imposes "coerced death," having begun his article by referring to the Schiavo case, then he ridicules "futile care" policies, of which the Schiavo diagnosis was an unequivocal example. Based on statistical analysis of many cases, as well as specific procedures and guidelines of the American Academy of Neurology, physicians know, with a high degree of "certitude," not "that a . . . life isn't worth living" but that a case of terminal coma or a persistent vegetative state (PVS) is irreversible, as the Schiavo case demonstrated.

The sometimes reversible "minimally conscious state" has been mistaken for PVS by both doctors and the public, but the Schiavo demise was "contentious" because of nonphysician hunches and exploitations of ignorance, not neurologic guessing nor MRI misinterpretation. Repeatedly, neurologists had concurred on PVS, MRIs had shown empty space where brain tissue should have been, and legal appeals had been decided correctly. Policies of medical futility are designed to acknowledge such diag-

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nostic certainty, while decisions to terminate one's own life relate not to "hijacked morality" but to continued misery with its agonizing postponement of death.

Sectarian nonsense insures a Dark Ages retrogression instead of the "death-with-dignity" enlightenment that a majority of Oregonians have approved. And current medical expertise provides certitude for both hospital and hospice terminal care and is not engaged in the clueless guessing game that Mr. Hentoff has described.

David S. Summers, M.D.
Neurologist (retired)
Erie, Pennsylvania

Nat Hentoff replies:

Covering the story while Terri Schiavo was alive, I interviewed a neurologist, not connected with either side in the controversy, who had thoroughly examined Terri Schiavo. He was emphatic in saying that she was not in a persistent vegetative state. And I had a transcript of a session that took place in the chambers of the Florida judge hearing the case in which he was given evidence, which he ignored, that, according to the definition in Florida law, she was not in that condition.

Dr. Summers refers scathingly to the "sectarian nonsense" of those who question what he calls "the enlightenment" of the "death with dignity" that Oregonians have approved. I am, Dr. Summers, an atheist, and a reporter who has done considerable published research in such contested cases. In the course of that research, I have covered a number of decisions by hospital ethics committees and bioethicists that certain lives were not worth living. But sometimes, their certitude, as Dr. Summers puts it, was proved wrong when the patients were taken to other hospitals.

Dr. Summers neglects to mention, with regard to the blessings of "death with dignity" in Oregon, that—as I stated in FREE INQUIRY—of the thirty-eight persons assisted to suicide in 2005 by Oregon law, only two were referred for psychiatric evaluation. Has Dr. Summers not heard of clinical depression?

Abortion and Contraception

I am an enthusiastic fan of FREE INQUIRY and struggle to read it, cover to cover, as soon as I can find time. But the letter titled "The Future of Abortion Rights" by James Valentine (*FI*, August/September 2006) sent me scurrying for my computer. I feel compelled to point out an error that those of us in the protecting-women's-lives and reproductive-rights camp have been having to dispel for quite some time. RU486 is, indeed, an abortifacient that, when properly prescribed and monitored by a qualified physician, will cause a pregnancy to be aborted. The "morning after pill," also known as "emergency contraception" or "EC," is *not* an abortion pill and can best be described as a "double-whammy" birth-control pill. It is for use in any circumstance where there has been unprotected sex, whether voluntary or involuntary. It must be used as soon as possible after the event, generally within seventy-two hours, because delay lowers its chances of efficacy as a pregnancy preventative. It will not, and this is key, harm an already implanted pregnancy. In other words, it will not cause an abortion.

Women's-rights groups are constantly trying to inform the antiscience, antitruth, antiwoman Bush administration and his politicized Food and Drug Administration that EC is safe and effective and should be sold over the counter. Why this administration cannot figure out that the leading cause of abortion is unwanted pregnancy is beyond me. And since women can and do still die in childbirth, the administration's ignorance and arrogance is criminal.

Linda Farrell
Bella Vista, Arizona

The Complex Issue of Plagiarism

In her interesting, partially tongue-in-cheek review of some recent scandals involving the theft of intellectual property ("Our Culture of Plagiarism," *FI*, August/September 2006), Wendy Kaminer draws on several examples to show the complexity and confusion in this area of societal

folly. She extends these ideas beyond the copying of printed words to political and corporate speech-making, as well as the lengths many students go to in plagiarizing papers to *succeed* in their education. She even offers some token advice to would-be plagiarists on how to avoid detection.

It is clear that traditional notions about the copying and use of products of mental work have broken down. There is a need to understand the situation better—to consider the justice and utility of what is involved and to modify our ethical thinking, as well as the law. The subject comprises, not only people's ideas and artwork, but more generally, their identity and freedom.

Because Kaminer is a lawyer, she might have distinguished between the ethical and legal aspects of plagiarism and considered more seriously the motivations of those involved. Unless intelligent citizens become involved in such needed reform, it will be done, by default, solely by corporate lawyers, to our detriment.

Bob Goldberg
Jericho, New York

Progressives Strike Back

"War's Iraqi Death Toll Tops 50,000"—this was a headline in the World News section of the *Los Angeles Times* on July 29, 2006. To me, this number represents the horror of the so-called war in Iraq. To Christopher Hitchens, it seems to mean nothing at all.

I've been thinking for some time of writing to explain why I'm not renewing my several-year subscription to FREE INQUIRY. Now, I've finally had enough. When your magazine touts columnists such as Hitchens and Nat Hentoff, I know that your version of humanism doesn't remotely accord with mine.

Perhaps, you say, it's wrong for me to assume that Hitchens doesn't care about the fifty thousand dead in Iraq. But let me give you an example of a similar assumption from Hitchens's article "Vice Verso," in the August/September 2006 issue of FREE INQUIRY: "In some ignorant and subliminal way, leftists identify bin Laden

(Continued on page 66)

TOM FLYNN

The Seductions of Misbelief

Odds are, few FREE INQUIRY readers check their watches and think, “Hmm, it’s after five in Amherst, New York—I wonder what Tom Flynn’s doing?” Still, for the last couple of years, there’s been a reliable answer to that question. I’ve been spending most of my after-work and weekend hours editing a thumping-big reference book. *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief*, soon to be published by Prometheus Books, is designed as the successor to Gordon Stein’s groundbreaking 1985 *The Encyclopedia of Unbelief*. It’s a comprehensive reference work covering the full spectrum of unbelief, of which secular humanism is a part.

Unbelief is a deliberately generic term, intended to rise above those endless arguments over labels that atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, and secular humanists have among themselves. Of course, FREE INQUIRY focuses on secular humanism, which we might describe in shorthand as that subset of religious unbelief endowed with the most fully developed cosmic and ethical outlook. Though secular humanists are unbelievers by definition, not all unbelievers are secular humanists. Think of Stalin, or of people you know who espouse the sort of moral nihilism depicted in Woody Allen’s films, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* and *Match Point*. Editing *FI* while editing *The New Encyclopedia* meant straddling that gap: working as a secular humanist by day, a generic atheist by night. And it prompted the question of whether—or why—unbelief matters as a necessary (though admittedly insufficient) component of our secular humanist eu-praxsophy.



Does unbelief matter? In my opinion, it matters very much. Americans, religious and otherwise, might disagree, noting that religiosity seems so pervasive and is rapidly expanding in public life. Some Europeans might disagree also, noting that religiosity has shriveled and now seems socially irrelevant outside of Muslim immigrant communities. The very fact that unbelief seems unimportant for opposing reasons—and that merely within the confines of Western culture—should give us pause before we consign unbelief to history’s bulging dustbin. True, many of unbelief’s most prestigious recent advocates—twentieth-century labor reformers, political revolutionaries, and academic Marxists—have largely melted away. Atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, and old-line freethinkers and anticlericals stand increasingly alone on the barricades of radical reform. Despite these historical developments, the fundamental stance that all unbelievers share—the conviction that the everyday world of matter, energy, and their interactions is either *all*

“Does unbelief matter?
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very much.”

that exists or *all that matters*—is inescapably significant.

Consider how important it would be if unbelievers’ naturalistic worldview were definitely proven wrong. Imagine for the sake of argument that the core contentions of Christian monotheism were somehow demonstrated to be correct beyond any possibility of question. If the universe really is intentionally designed and the designer knows and cares for each of us—if we truly host immortal souls that will know eternities of ecstasy or pain determined by our behavior during eyeblink sojourns on earth—if this is true, then *the knowledge that this is true* would be the most important item of knowledge any human being could possess. No scientific discovery, no mathematical theorem, no artistic expression, no secret to success, no avowal of love could ever be as significant as the knowledge that *accurately* gave us the key to eternity.

But now imagine (as unbelievers hold to be the case) that no conventional theistic worldview is true—but that millions of people still order their lives, allocate their resources, and make decisions as though some form of theism *were* true. Knowing this is terribly important, too, if for a different reason. To believing critics, I propose a thought experiment. Suppose for a moment that we unbelievers are correct. Suppose that each human being is nothing more than an accidental and temporary convergence of pattern . . . that nothing is eternal . . . that the only values we can hold authentically are the ones we create and embrace for ourselves. Suppose most of all that *this life is the only one that any of us will ever have*. If these things are true, then the most important

item of knowledge any religious believer could ever possess would be the knowledge that his or her faith is groundless.

Denied that knowledge, ardent believers—perhaps we should think of them as *mis*believers—will go on squandering the precious hours of their only lives pursuing otherworldly rewards that will never—*can* never—be theirs. In addition to making empty investments in ineffectual prayer and ritual, misbelievers may forsake harmless pleasures (think Mormons and coffee), disdain beneficial practices (think Christian Scientists and medical care or Muslims and commercial credit), or embrace positively harmful courses of action (think witch-hunting and female genital mutilation, merely the first examples that come to mind).

Decades ago, religious liberalism held out the promise that it might domesticate sacerdotal conviction, making of faith something less at odds with naturalism. Sadly, religious liberalism no longer commands such momentum. In recent years, the fastest-growing pieties have tended to be literalistic and retrograde, and to grow at the expense of liberal strands within their particular faith communities. The odds are greater today than at any time in nearly a century that a randomly chosen religious believer will be a literalist, if not an outright fundamentalist, within whatever tradition he or she inhabits. If false beliefs are so likely to be taken so seriously by so many, then we cannot avoid this harrowing conclusion: *if unbelief is true, countless misbelievers are stunting their only lives in tragic and eventually irremediable ways.* That is one reason why unbelief matters very much.

Or consider this. Across our world, billions embrace one religion or another. Tens of billions of person-hours, hundreds of billions of dollars, are devoted each year to affairs of faith. How much might the human prospect have been improved had this energy and these resources been even partially redirected toward improving the human prospect in *this* world? What technological innovations do we live without today, what medical breakthroughs remain undiscovered, what dazzling philosophical and artistic ideas remain unconceived? (Keep in mind that I'm not

even talking about the way some faiths engender hostility toward scientific discovery or the social application of its products—for now, I'm focused solely on the diversion of resources.) If unbelievers are right and no religion is true, why wait another moment before striving to deflect so much human passion and wealth into channels at whose end some *real* benefit can result?

Believers may find these suggestions shocking—which merely underscores the significance of the gulf between the

“... if unbelief is true,
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way believers and unbelievers look at the world. Most (though not all) believers see human nature as a duality of body and spirit; they see their brains not as what they *are* but as things they *have*. They see the universe as planned and purposive, as something understood in its totality by a force that is essentially benign. Many see morality as definite, inflexible, and ordained. Most view reality as eternal and attach primary significance to the countless eons that they expect will follow this life.

While unbelievers are far from homogeneous, most would disagree with this cluster of views. Most unbelievers see human nature as monistic; consciousness is simply what goes on in our brains as viewed from the inside, which is to say that we *are* our brains. Many reject any idea of “spirit” or immaterial causation; with due allowance for hierarchies of emergent properties, at base, everything *is* physics. Most unbelievers see the universe as unplanned, as purposeless, as something that has never been understood *in toto* and probably never will be, unless one day human beings (or other intelligences of equally natural origin) rise to that challenge. Far from benign, unbelievers see the universe as coldly

neutral—or they may discern, as Bertrand Russell did, a mute hostility in the relentless, uncaring order of the cosmos. On morality, opinion is diverse. Some unbelievers feel that morality must be utterly flexible and relative. Some argue that, without God, all things are possible, so we should launch ourselves headlong into every possible alternative, run every experiment, test every option, break every barrier, upturn every custom. Others conclude that we can discern the outlines of an objective moral code that best serves the welfare of human communities, because it is best fitted to the way humans think and interact. What almost all unbelievers agree on is that no part of morality has been ordained, there being no entity in a position to do the ordaining. As for cosmology, science says our universe had a distinct beginning and predicts it will one day end; eternity, it would seem, is not in the cards.

This brings us to what is perhaps the most fundamental difference between believers and unbelievers: whereas most traditional religious believers claim to attach primary importance to eternity, unbelievers necessarily attach primary—indeed, sole—importance to *this* life. Hence the sick anguish many of us feel as we watch our believing fellow citizens throw away vast chunks of their only lives—lives whose precious, solitary finitude their faiths render them powerless to grasp.

Unbelief, I conclude, matters very much. Its contentions, implications, and history merit study. Its place among the foundation stones of our secular humanist eupraxsophy is unquestionable, even as we recognize that a fully realized secular humanism encompasses more than unbelief alone. As for *The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief*, if I have succeeded as its editor, I hope that it will do some small justice to the importance of its subject. Perhaps it will be a portal through which at least some believers can better come to understand how unbelievers see the universe. And perhaps it will aid in liberating a few more human beings from the seductions of misbelief. **ff**

Tom Flynn is the editor of FREE INQUIRY. This essay is adapted from his Editor's Introduction to The New Encyclopedia of Unbelief.

DAVID KOEPSSELL

Is There a God?

Go Ask Alice

A recent study conducted at Johns Hopkins sought to explain the neurological effects of psilocybin, the active ingredient in the *Psilocybe* genus of mushrooms. While millions of amateur researchers have been investigating the subjective effects of so-called magic mushrooms for decades, and they've been used in Native American ritual for perhaps thousands of years, the psychopharmacological studies conducted by the researchers were intended to explore the potential therapeutic use and effect of the drug. Such studies have been conducted before, including significant studies in the sixties and seventies regarding the use of another popular compound, MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, commonly known as ecstasy), in psychotherapy. Of course, these studies have typically been frowned upon in the context of the ongoing and



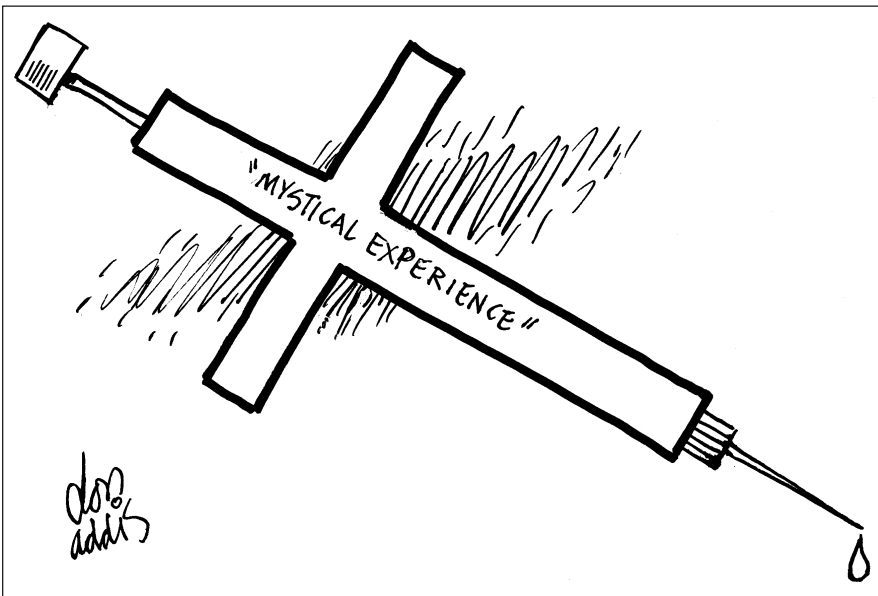
largely fruitless “war on drugs”—which is why, perhaps, the latest results have been cast in the light of “spirituality.”

The investigators of the magic mushrooms took pains to couch their findings in the language of spirituality, describing the effects as a “full mystical experi-

ence.” Researchers also noted that a good majority of the subjects used in the study described feelings of well-being that lasted for months after they ingested the drug. About a quarter of the subjects, however, experienced depression, anxiety, and other negative effects. Nonetheless, the study offers interesting promise for potential therapeutic uses of psilocybin, or at least for considerable further study. Two things are striking about this study: the language used by researchers in describing the results and the rather odd reaction from some theologians.

Naturally, the notion that mystical experiences could be chemically induced threatens those believers who insist that direct experience of a deity is not simply a brain state. Linking supernatural or spiritual events to natural causes (rather than *vice versa*) undermines theology. This is perhaps why, in reaction to the results of the study, some theologians felt it necessary to alert people that magic mushrooms are not the ticket to a *bona fide* religious experience: “All this did was stimulate that part of the human personality that produced certain feeling states and altered states of consciousness,” said theologian Dave Reed, a professor at the University of Toronto. “Those are no criteria for an authentic encounter with God” (CBC News, July 12, 2006).

Of course, we are left to ponder what would qualify as an “authentic” encounter with God, given that accounts of such encounters from saints and prophets are generally as trippy as those of your average stoner. Take, for example, the words of St. Teresa of Avila, who wrote in *The Interior Castle* that, during her mystical experiences, the soul “is utterly dead to the things of the world, and lives solely in God . . . I do not know whether in this state she has enough life left to breathe. It seems to me she has not; or at least that if she does breathe, she is unaware of it.” What did she eat for lunch, do you suppose?



In fact, mystical experiences are not uncommon. The naturalist philosopher/psychologist William James described some common elements such experiences often share. He was also known to induce them chemically in experiments on himself. The common elements he noticed were: (1) ineffability: they involve emotive rather than intellectual components and are difficult to describe or understand; (2) noetic quality: they involve a transcendence of time and space; (3) transiency: they ebb and flow quickly and cannot be held onto for long; and finally (4) passivity: the experiencer is overcome, swept up in the state beyond control and beyond exertion of his or her will. Neuroscience has actually shown a number of ways in which these experiences can be induced, including by electromagnetic fields and low-oxygen environments, in connection with which near-death experiences are also routinely noted. It is thus surprising that the scientists associated with the study felt compelled to

back off any conclusions regarding the applicability of their study to a scientific understanding of the weight of the evidence for the existence of God based upon chemically induced mystical experiences: “We’re just measuring what can be observed,” said Roland Griffiths . . . who led the study. “We’re not entering into ‘Does God exist or not exist.’ This work can’t and won’t go there” (CBC News, *ibid.*).

In fact, isn’t one of the obvious conclusions of this and similar studies that mystical experiences are chemically or environmentally induced brain states and that no alleged encounter with God can be deemed any more or less authentic than ones brought about by hallucinogenic drugs or a lack of oxygen to the brain? A fair and honest path of further exploration, based upon this and other similar studies, would be to delve into the neurochemical basis for all mystical experiences, even so-called authentic ones, rather than to dismiss automatically, without

such study, the potential that all experiences of this sort arise from brain states.

What seems likely at this stage, because of the potential of such studies to undermine traditional mystical theology and our nation’s aversion to legitimizing therapeutic uses of drugs that are commonly abused, nothing further will come of this study, despite its interesting promise. In the meantime, we should feel comfortable with some preliminary confirmation of a thesis many of us hold: that mystical experiences do in fact occur, that they are completely naturalistically based, and that there is no basis to view those occurring in convents or seminaries as any more legitimate than those that occurred on the corner of Haight and Ashbury back in its heyday. **f i**

David Koepsell is the executive director of the Council for Secular Humanism and an assistant research professor at the University at Buffalo.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Anglicans and Idiocy

All religions are demented on all matters of sex, but, when it comes to homosexual sex, they become positively deranged. The latest and most amusing manifestation of this mania comes courtesy of the Anglican or Episcopalian Church, which is normally thought of as one of the more restrained and moderate denominations. A number of local dioceses, mainly in England and North America, have agreed to allow their bishops and priests to hold “holy orders” and to be admittedly gay at the same time. This does no more than affirm a preexisting status quo, whereby the church was rife with flagrant yet closeted homosexuals: the only thing that has changed is the requirement of hypocrisy. However, it was probably a mistake for the Anglican



authorities to put this in writing. For one thing, the Bible—and all other Abrahamic “scripture,” from the Judaic to the Qur’anic—is quite explicit in defining at least male homosexuality as a mortal sin to be visited with lurid pun-

“If homosexuality is alien to God, or to ‘nature,’ then how can it be that a creator, or the ‘natural’ world, has always allowed for a large homosexual margin within the natural order?”

ishments both now and in the hereafter. (Some gay religious types have tried to find wiggle room, if you excuse the expression, in certain obscure verses, but they ought to be frank and admit that their supposed religions all hate them.)

For another thing, there are powerful constituencies within Anglicanism—located chiefly in Africa but also in parts of England and the United States—that

embarrassingly insist on the holy books as the literal word of God. How awkward! And these groups have threatened to secede and create a schism if the recognition of homosexual clergy is confirmed. (One incidental result of this, according to a charming recent story in *The New York Times*, is that some American congregations have become aware for the first time that they can be out-voted by bishops in Africa. They should have read their Augustine more closely.)

The last statement that I read from an African Anglican bishop was absolutely priceless. Homosexuality, he intoned, was so abhorrent that not even animals would engage in the practice. This seems bizarre from several points of view. First, why not make the equally true statement that homosexuals are, therefore, *not* behaving like beasts? Second, has the bishop never heard of the bonobo monkeys and countless other species, mammalian and otherwise, that in fact *do* resort to this form of consolation? Which is it to be? And why should other fauna be the standard in the first place? Of course, it is futile to hope for coherence from priests in this or any other sexual matter.

The useful element in this silly intra-Christian dispute is provided by the light it throws on the evolution-creation debate. We know for an absolute certainty that some fraction of the human species is, and always has been, homosexual. (That this has always been known is proved by the ancient and fierce prohibitions against it.) We also know that a much larger fraction is at least open to homosexual feelings. Some gay activists exaggerate the point, but a vast tradition of poetry, art, music, and philosophy testifies to this very salient fact. There has been talk of a “gay gene,” but, from the standpoint of conventional evolutionism, which talks mainly of adaptation for survival and the passing on of one’s own genes, the persistence of homosexuality is a mild conundrum. Of course, homosexuals can and do have children, so the test of the theory is not a very strenuous one. It may in any case attest to something that is very evident from the early dawn of civilization, namely, the strong human need to separate sex from procreation.

After all, any reader of this column can think of at least two acts well within the range of sexual activities of the heterosexual couple that are defined as “sodomy” by Judeo-Christian-Islamic law. If every orgasm led to a larger posterity, where would we all be?

Not having space to go on about all that—much as I would like to—I merely point out that the same dilemma results in complete chaos in the religious interpretation. If homosexuality is alien to God, or to “nature,” then how can it be that a creator, or the “natural” world, has always allowed for a large homosexual margin within the natural order? What kinds of orders and commandments are these? “Hate the sin and love the sinner,” say the oily, monotheistic casuists. That’s a distinction without a difference, and it exposes the moral emptiness at the heart of religion. Try loving someone in spite of a “sin” that is part of his or her very identity. Or try hating just the identity and then loving the person. Untold misery has been

caused by this idiocy, and it’s a sour joke that the misery was (and still is) so often inflicted by clergymen who had a repressed and dirty-minded share in what they ostensibly condemned.

As in all cases: make the assumption that we are a somewhat-evolved animal species, and no problem of moral fanaticism, or claim to impossible knowledge, can arise. Room can be made for all manner of “deviations” from an unknowable “norm.” Make the opposite assumption, that a god created us one way and then commanded us to be another, and you will have to redefine stupidity as well as prepare yourself for the tongs and pincers of yet another perfectionist inquisition. I hope the Anglicans have their schism and that it wrecks their church and later wrecks all its competitors. **fe**

Christopher Hitchens is a columnist for Vanity Fair. His most recent book is Thomas Jefferson: Author of America (HarperCollins, 2005).

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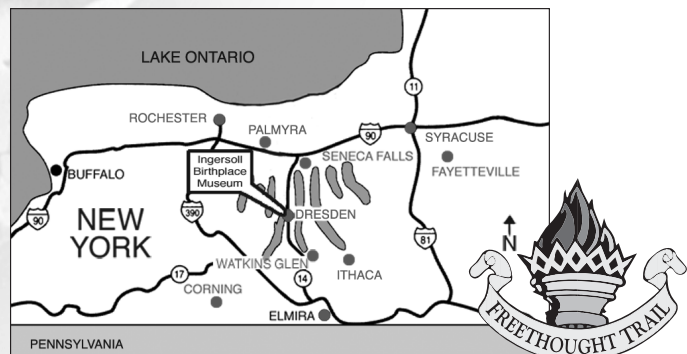
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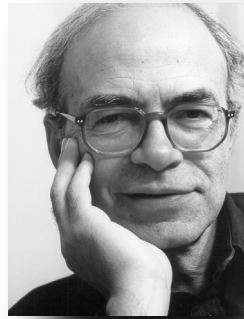
PETER SINGER

What Greater Motivation?

Warren Buffett is, according to *Forbes Magazine*, the second wealthiest person in the world with assets of \$42 billion. He may not hold that ranking for long, because in June he made the largest philanthropic commitment in the history of the United States. He announced that he would give \$30 billion to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and another \$7 billion to other charitable foundations. Even when the gifts made by Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller are adjusted for inflation, Buffett's gift is greater.

Bill Gates Jr., the only person wealthier than Warren Buffett, also made a commitment in June. Having previously endowed the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation with close to \$29 billion, he announced that in 2008 he would leave Microsoft to concentrate on working with the foundation.

As Marc Hauser and I indicated in a previous issue of *FREE INQUIRY* ("Morality without Religion," December 2005/January 2006), many Americans think that, without religion, people have no reason to act ethically—or indeed have no grounds, other than self-interest, for doing anything. It is significant, therefore, that in a country in which 96 percent of the population says that it believes in a supreme being, neither of the two greatest American philanthropists of the modern era is religious. Buffett is described by his biographer, Roger Lowenstein, in the following terms: "He did not subscribe to his family's religion. Even at a young age he was too mathematical, too logical, to make the leap of faith. He adopted his father's ethical underpinnings, but not his belief in an unseen divinity"



(*Buffett: The Making of an American Capitalist*, Doubleday, 1995).

Buffett's sharp divergence from conservative American religious belief is shown by his strong support for reproductive rights. Among the commitments he made in June was a donation of stock valued at about \$3 billion to the Susan Thompson Buffett Foundation, named after his late wife, which has in the past given substantial support to abortion-rights causes.

Bill Gates was asked in an interview in the January 13, 1997, issue of *Time* whether he thought that there was something special, perhaps even divine, about the human soul. He answered: "I don't have any evidence of that." Later in the same story, he is quoted as saying: "Just in terms of allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient. There's a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning."

Another major contemporary American philanthropist, the financier George Soros, was admirably concise when questioned about his religious beliefs on *60 Minutes* of December 20, 1998:

"It is significant . . . that in a country in which 96 percent of the population says that it believes in a supreme being, neither of the two greatest American philanthropists of the modern era is religious."

Steve Kroft: Are you a religious man?
Soros: No.
Kroft: Do you believe in God?
Soros: No.

We shouldn't be surprised. Andrew Carnegie, perhaps the greatest philanthropist in history prior to Buffett and Gates, openly denied believing in God. That means that three out of the four greatest American philanthropists have been atheists or agnostics. (The exception is John D. Rockefeller.)

The other notable feature about Buffett's and Gates's philanthropy, in addition to the sheer size of their donations, is that, unlike so many American donors, they do not give towards building monuments for themselves such as new hospitals, cancer-research centers, or splendid architectural statements at elite universities. Instead, the bulk of the money is directed towards relieving human suffering. Consistent with his desire to use his Sunday mornings in a manner more effectively than going to church, Gates has directed most of his money towards finding cures for the diseases that do the most harm, not to people like him—citizens of the developed world—but to people as a whole. The prevailing pattern in medical research is that 90 percent of all research, worldwide, is directed towards medical conditions that account for only 10 percent of the global burden of disease. Pneumonia,

diarrhea, tuberculosis, and malaria together are responsible for more than 20 percent of the global disease burden, but they receive less than 1 percent of the funds, public and private, devoted to health research. Or at least they did before Gates and now Buffett entered the picture. That percentage will increase because of the priorities, and resources, of the Gates Foundation.

So what motivates these nonreligious philanthropists? I don't really know for sure, and in a way, it doesn't much matter, as long as their money does so much good. Some years ago, however, I put the same question to Henry Spira, another highly effective philanthropist and ani-

mal-rights activist. Since he never had much money, Spira's form of philanthropy was to devote his time, energy, and very considerable intellect to campaigning for the downtrodden and oppressed, irrespective of race or species.

When I put the question to him, Spira had cancer and knew he did not have long to live. As an atheist, he regarded death as the end of his existence. I asked him what had driven him to spend his life working for others. He replied: "I guess basically one wants to feel that one's life has amounted to more than just consuming products and generating garbage. I think that one likes to look back and say that one's done the best one can to make this a better place for

others. You can look at it from this point of view: what greater motivation can there be than doing whatever one possibly can to reduce pain and suffering?"

Perhaps that is also what drives Buffett and Gates. It may be that simple, but many religious people just don't get it. **ff**

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NAT HENTOFF

Rescuing the Constitution from the Flag

One morning in 1990, in Justice William Brennan's Supreme Court chambers, I asked him a schoolboy's question: "What's your favorite part of the Bill of Rights?"

"The First Amendment, of course," he replied. "All our liberties flow from the First Amendment."

On June 27, in the United States Senate, we were only one vote away from weakening the First Amendment for the first time since 1791, when—as any schoolboy should know—the Bill of Rights was ratified, thereby enabling the Constitution, signed in 1787, to go into full effect.

Before the Senate in June was a constitutional amendment to the First Amendment, declaring: "The Congress shall have the power to prohibit the

physical desecration of the flag of the United States." Since 1990, this authorization to punish flag desecration (otherwise undefined) has five times failed to get the necessary two-thirds vote in the Senate.



The House has passed what is actually this desecration of the First Amendment seven times—last year by a vote of 286–130. Not only are many students—from kindergarten to graduate school—deficient in their knowledge of our constitutional history, but obviously, so is the majority of the members of Congress.

In covering this story—which I have done each time this amendment was on the verge of being sent to the state legislatures, all of which have now passed resolutions welcoming its coming (passage by thirty-eight states would change the Constitution)—I felt the flag idolators had at last won. My sources told me the one vote (they weren't sure which one) guarding the First Amendment was shaky.

But to the acute disappointment of George W. Bush, who supported the amendment, the final vote was 66–34. Holding back the righteous majority were thirty Democrats, three Republicans, and one Independent. (In the previous vote six years ago, four senators saved the day.

As Roger Baldwin, founder of the American Civil Liberties Union, once told me, "No civil liberties battle is ever won—permanently." Republican Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah, the principal sponsor of the flag-desecration amend-

ment—anticipating a possible change in the composition of the Senate in this year's elections—fully intends to join the battle again.

In this year's hairbreadth victory, it is difficult to single out any of the resisters as deserving of a presidential Liberty Medal (as could be bestowed by some future president). But I nominate Mitch McConnell, Kentucky's senior senator, Republican majority whip, and—if the Republicans maintain a majority this year—the next majority leader. (The incumbent, Bill Frist, now running for president, was an ardent supporter of the flag-desecration amendment.)

McConnell is a conservative, but he is usually a defender of the First Amendment. Breaking with the president and Majority Leader Frist, McConnell said before the vote: "Our Founding Fathers wrote the First Amendment because they believed that, even with all its excesses and offenses, freedom of speech would undoubtedly allow truth and reason to triumph in the end. . . . No act of speech is so obnoxious that it merits tampering with our First Amendment. Doing so could also set a dangerous precedent for the rest of the Bill of Rights." As the threat of worldwide terrorism continues, quite possibly for decades, it is not at all inconceivable that the already diminished Fourth Amendment, for example, could face terminal revision by a constitutional amendment—with Dick Cheney carrying the flag.

This year, I was not surprised to see John McCain—trying to softshoe his way to the presidency by continually testing the majority winds—vote for the flag-desecration amendment. But Arlen Specter was a disappointment, since he has been a relatively independent chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, currently criticizing presidential lawlessness in authorizing warrantless National Security Agency surveillance of our phones and e-mails. Specter has also been objecting to Bush's use of "signing statements" to decide which bills of those he has signed into law he will actually implement.

But Specter, opening the debate on June 27 in support of the flag-desecration amendment, actually said: "I think it's important to focus on the basic fact that the text of the First Amendment,

the text of the Constitution, the text of the Bill of Rights is not involved" by adding the new seventeen words of the amendment. (A classic example of what George Orwell called "Newspeak.")

Matching Specter in obfuscation was Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein, who assured her California constituents, and all the rest of us, that the intent of this proposed change to the First Amendment was "both to protect the flag and the First Amendment speech protections."

And where was the Senate Democratic Minority Leader, Harry Reid? He voted for the constitutional amendment, explaining afterwards that he went along with the majority because he didn't think it would pass. Clearly, he is a senator of steadfast principle, further displaying the less-than-inspiring leadership of the opposition Democratic Party.

Apprehensive as I was during the floor debate, I was heartened by Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy, who, in a speech opposing the amendment, quoted from the one Supreme Court decision most clearly defining "Americanism." In 1943, during the Second World War, the case before the Court, *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, involved the expulsion from that state's school system of Jehovah's

On June 27, the United States Senate was one vote away from weakening the First Amendment for the first time since 1791.

Witnesses' children because their religion forbade them to salute a graven image (in particular, the flag of the United States). Moreover, their parents faced charges of contributing to the delinquency of their minor children.

Speaking for the Court, Justice Robert Jackson—later our chief prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials—declared, as Senator Leahy quoted: "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or any other matters of opinion—or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein."

After the Senate vote, among a number of newspaper editorials cheering the rescue of the First Amendment (although



other editorials called for a rematch), the most striking was in the *New York Post*—a decidedly conservative daily owned by Rupert Murdoch. The headline, in what its masthead accurately describes as “America’s oldest continuously published daily newspaper,” was “Burn That Amendment,” followed by: “To amend the Constitution to ‘protect’

a symbol is an insult to the very document being amended.”

For the coming elections, Republican strategists are already planning ways to question the patriotism of the Democratic senators who opposed the flag-desecration amendment. Will their leader, Harry Reid, defend his fellow Democrats? **fi**

Nat Hentoff is a regular columnist for The Village Voice and The Washington Times, a United Media syndicated columnist, and the author of Living the Bill of Rights (University of California Press, 1999) and The War on the Bill of Rights and the Gathering Resistance (Seven Stories Press, 2004).

SHADIA B. DRURY

Sin, Sex, and Celibacy

There is reason to believe that the sexual-abuse scandals that have shaken the Catholic Church for the last two decades and implicated its highest-ranking officials reveal a pervasive culture within the Church. Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston was forced to resign in disgrace because he was complicit in concealing the criminal conduct of his priests by shuffling them to new parishes. But this scandalous conduct did not prevent Pope John Paul II from offering Cardinal Law a plum post as head of the St. Mary Major Basilica in Rome. The basilica is under the jurisdiction of the Vatican and, therefore, beyond the reach of secular law.

Despite the crisis of authority caused by the sexual-abuse scandals, the newly inaugurated Pope Benedict XVI shows no sign of softening the Church’s position on celibacy. On the contrary, the world has bought the argument that the whole scandal amounts to nothing more than a few bad priests who should not be allowed to cast a shadow on the Church and its policies. Even those who have denounced the Church as decrepit and spiritually bankrupt have stopped short of criticizing its insistence on celibacy. Why is the Church determined to pursue what seems like a disastrous policy?

St. Peter, the most prominent disciple of Jesus and the first bishop of Rome, was married—as were most priests of the early Church. But the tide soon turned against marriage. Apart from the financial profit of having priests with no legiti-



mate heirs, was there any other reason for the policy?

The veneration of celibacy has its source in the New Testament. In a discussion of marriage with his disciples, Jesus said that monogamy was the only form of marriage that was acceptable and that marriage was indissoluble except in cases of adultery (Matthew 19:11–12). The strictness of Jesus’ teaching was rather startling to the disciples, who were accustomed to the polygamous laxity of Mosaic Law and the ease with which men could dispose of wives whom they no longer fancied. The new teaching seemed so strict that they wondered if it was worth the trouble to get married at all. Jesus took this opportunity to casually remark that it was not a bad idea to become a “eunuch for the kingdom of heaven’s sake” (Matthew 19:12). The Church has followed Saint Augustine (354–430) in interpreting this remark as a reference to celibacy rather than a literal

endorsement of self-castration. But Jesus did not endorse mandatory celibacy. He said that it was optional: “He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”

On another occasion, when Jesus was discussing life after the Resurrection with his disciples, he said that marriage does not exist in heaven. In heaven, people live like angels, and they “neither marry, nor are given in marriage” (Matthew 22:30; Luke 20:35). The implication was that the virginal life is akin to the life of angels in heaven.

When Jesus was led away to his crucifixion, he anticipated the day when “they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck” (Luke 23:29). This was a reference to the spiritual kingdom to come, but it revealed a definite hostility toward procreation, not to mention family values.

In light of what Jesus said, it is not surprising that the fathers of the Church regarded virginity as a virtue second only to martyrdom. After all, Jesus indicated that it was a state of purity that made men akin to angels and fit for the company of God—surely an advantage where salvation was concerned. Since virginity was a state of purity, the fathers deduced that all carnal knowledge was sin, filth, and defilement. Anyone who disagreed with this assessment of the matter was condemned as a heretic, with all the horrors that implied. Jovinian, a fourth-century monk who decided that marriage was superior to celibacy, was scourged with leaden whips and exiled to the island of Boa. More than a thousand years later, in 1518, when Erasmus wrote a treatise praising marriage and criticizing celibacy, the Church condemned him as a heretic, and all of his work was placed on the

Index of Forbidden Books. In 1525, when Louis de Berquin translated Erasmus's book into French, he was executed. In other words, celibacy was, and still is, a core value of monumental significance. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to ask: are there any good reasons for the practice?

The patron saint of the Catholic Church, Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274), argued that celibacy allows men freedom from the cares of married life to devote themselves to the service and contemplation of God. And echoing Jesus, he claimed that those who are undefiled by sexual passion are pure enough for the company of God in the beyond. All the Church fathers realized that celibacy was difficult because of the strength and intensity of the sexual drive and the “fact” that the Devil uses it to extend his dominion. Accordingly, the triumph over sexuality came to be regarded as a triumph over the Devil.

What made the withdrawal from sexuality heroic is that it was a continual source of anguish. Saint Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394) put it bluntly when he said that the goal of virginity is to unite oneself with God; and this unity “comes from being crucified with Him” and sharing his agony. In other words, the celibate life mimics Christ's agony as well as his triumph over the Devil.

In short, the main reasons for the veneration of celibacy are freedom from worldly cares, purity from the defilement of conjugal love, and imitation of the virginal life of Christ, his agony, and his triumph over the Devil.

There are several reasons for objecting to these arguments in defense of celibacy. First, the radical thwarting of this natural inclination is more likely to interfere with contemplation in general and the contemplation of God in particular. It is those who have totally shunned these pleasures who suffer from the greatest fascination with them—a fascination that preoccupies their minds. Aquinas was busy contemplating the six different species of lust, defining lustful looks and lustful kisses, imagining the sex life of Adam and Eve, and worrying that the caresses of women might enfeeble the manly mind and threaten salvation. I venture to suggest that ordinary mortals who satisfy themselves now and again have more leisure for the contemplation of higher things.

Second, on careful examination, the life of the monk does not turn out to be much of a triumph over the Devil. Far from silencing sexual desire, the life of the monk strengthens it. Even in his old age, St. Augustine complained of “nocturnal pollutions.” St. Jerome beat his chest with a stone to drive away the evil desire he had for a dancing girl he saw in Rome. St. Francis tried to cool the lust that burned within him by caressing figures made of snow. St. Benedict stripped himself naked and rolled around in thorny bushes to chastise his body for its lust. St. Bernard was prone to so much self-flagellation that his body reeked (probably with pus from infection) and no one could stand to be near him. Far from undermining sexuality, radical repression has the effect of intensifying it. All this frustrated desire stokes the flames of hell. From his experience as a monk, Martin Luther realized that the severity of sensual deprivation succeeds only in giving the Devil the upper hand and that the temptations of Satan are at their most powerful in monasteries. So, he decided to marry Katharina von Bora in 1525.

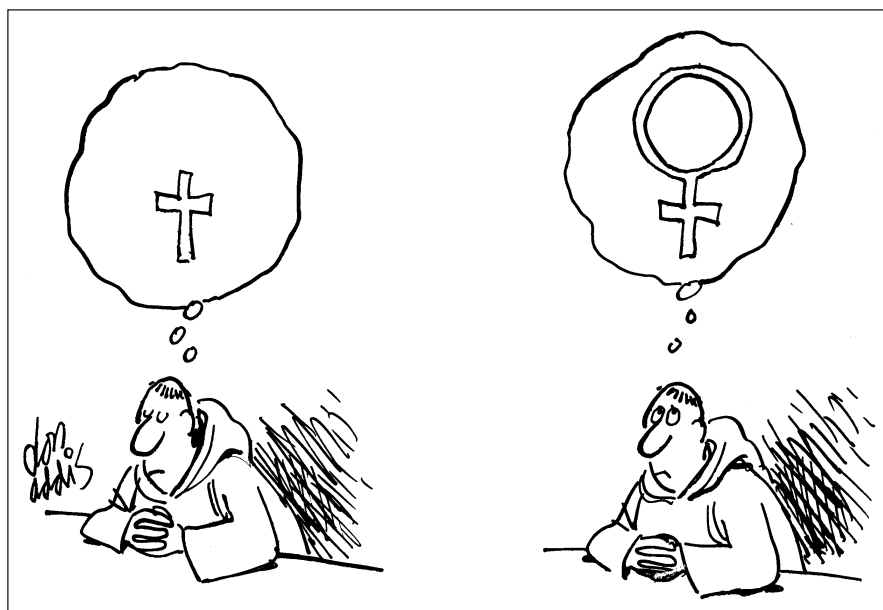
Third, when sex is identified with sin in the minds of men, women generally bear the burden of this vilification. Perhaps the greatest vice of the celibate creed is that it cannot be sustained without actively cultivating hatred and antipathy toward womankind. Men who experience their sexuality as the greatest threat to their salvation cannot regard

women with a simulacrum of objective detachment, let alone humanity. And this is why the opposition of the Catholic Church to the ordination of women cannot be totally separated from its exaltation of celibacy and attendant demonization of women.

Fourth, celibacy is connected to the ascetic chastisement of the flesh. But to what end is all this self-inflicted anguish? What is the point of this ascetic self-immolation? Who is benefited by this ordeal? Clearly, it is meant to be witnessed by God, but why would such a spectacle be pleasing to him? The idea that God enjoys witnessing the torments of those who love him casts serious aspersions on him because it imputes to him a sadistic pleasure. Of course, the God of Christianity has always been somewhat suspect—is he not a father who requires the death and torment of his innocent son to satisfy his sense of justice?

For the sake of Christians who do not suspect that they worship a sadistic God, the church should reconsider its policy of mandatory celibacy. At the very least, it should follow the example of Jesus and make celibacy optional. **f i**

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VERN L. BULLOUGH

Gender and Science

We are very conscious of the contributions humanism has made to the development of science. We honor the great philosophers and scientists of the past and claim many leading figures as our own, from thinkers of the Enlightenment to Darwin and the scientists of his era. But humanists tend not to know as much about newer developments in science that have changed the world—and about the great humanist scholars of the twentieth century who stand behind them.

The most significant development of the second half of the twentieth century was the redefinition of gender. This became a social movement that would be led by individual humanists such as Betty Friedan, a member of the International Academy of Humanism, and given its first intellectual foundation by John Money, also an Academy member. Friedan was much more emotional about the issue and much more political, but the science on which it was based had been developed by Money in the 1950s. Like most scientific breakthroughs, redefining gender was not a single-step process. Indeed, its development involved critical missteps by Money that set the movement back for a time but proved correctable.

This movement, in which I have been deeply involved, had its beginnings in the study of hermaphrodites. Money wanted a way to distinguish somatic and behavioral aspects of hermaphroditism from what might be called its biological, i.e., male and female, aspects. He seized upon the term *gender* to describe these differences, and this term was immediately adopted by individuals in a variety of disciplines, perhaps because it avoided the use of the term *sex*, which many thought unsuitable for public discourse.



The early, finite definition that Money and other scholars applied to *gender* was quickly abandoned. For whatever reason, questionnaires seeking to determine a person's sex, even those used by the government, no longer asked for sex but for gender. Feminists particularly favored the use of the term. Programs that had started out under the name "women's studies" were renamed "*gender studies*." This change made possible the inclusion of the study of men under the term *masculine gender*.

By 2004, there were more than four million Internet entries under "gender education." Almost every American university had a gender-studies program, as did many high schools. Gay and lesbian studies became gay, lesbian, and gender studies, or, more often, just gender studies. The idea of gender studies became ubiquitous. It escaped the confines of the social and behavioral sciences and expanded into literature, the humanities, and even biology.

In a related development, the word *chromosome* appeared late in the nineteenth century, though an accurate use of the term did not take shape until well into the twentieth century, when it was found that there were two different kinds of chromosomes, X and Y, with

"The most significant development of the second half of the twentieth century was the redefinition of gender."

women having two Xs and males having one X and one Y. People had always known there was a difference between men and women, but, until this development, they had never been able to satisfactorily explain it in biological terms.

The discovery of X and Y chromosomes also ushered in great advances in the study of fertility. Likewise, the discovery of hormones helped to explain in biological terms such phenomena as transvestitism, transsexualism, and bisexuality, as well as the intersex (persons born with ambiguous genitalia). This brings us back to Money, who had redefined *gender* in the course of his original studies of such groups. In my own 1994 history of sex research (*Science in the Bedroom: A History of Sex Research*), I predicted that gender would become the dominant theme of research into sexuality in the first part of the twenty-first century, and it certainly has been.

One advantage of using the term *gender studies* instead of *sexuality studies* is that the concept of gender demands a more variable interpretation of what being a woman or a man involves. Whether a person is an XX or an XY, there is much more to being a man or woman than chromosomes and the ability to impregnate or become pregnant. The term *gender* allows society to recognize that some women are more masculine than a significant minority of men, with the reverse being true for some men.

Data from gender studies showing and explaining these differences and similarities has accumulated rapidly, and

“I predicted that gender would become the dominant theme of research into sexuality in the first part of the twenty-first century, and it certainly has been.”

more disciplines have begun to contribute data about gender issues. The number of journals with *gender* in their titles has risen from none to several hundred. At the same time, increasing numbers of individuals are calling themselves “transgendered”—so many that some colleges and universities have established special facilities such as private bathrooms and showers for them. In effect, the growth of gender studies has resulted in basic challenges to customary ideas of what a man or woman should be—or could be.

It should be added that, as with any new scientific development, early explanations were not always accurate. This was true of Money’s early scientific descriptions of gender, which tended to ignore biology. His attempt to establish clear definitions ran into particular difficulty as the issue of transsexualism appeared on the stage. Transsexualism had been explored by Magnus Hirschfeld in Germany before World War I, but it was not until the discovery of hormones and of methods to produce them artificially—largely the work of American scientists during the war—that its biology began to be understood.

Experiments on animals revealed that, if a fetus was going to be female, the ovaries would not develop until a point well into gestation (in humans, the twelfth week). Animal experiments in which embryonic gonads were removed before the sexual anatomy was formed tended to cause the fetus to develop as a female, regardless of its chromosomal makeup. This seemed to imply that the normal development of the human fetus inclines toward the female. Once the testes begin to develop, they secrete a compound called the “Mullerian inhibit-

ing substance,” which suppresses all further development of the embryonic female.

In spite of the vast increase of publications on gender, there is still much that is not known. For a time, it was felt by some, influenced by John Colapinto, that there were critical periods during which the fetus could develop into either a male or female. The result was greater attention to biological components of variation, rather than simply examining the social setting or nurturing experience.

The more we learn, the more complicated the whole question of gender becomes. This seems to imply that the field of gender studies will continue to grow, since it offers such a rich field for research—and that, as the findings of such research broaden public understandings about gender, radical changes in public behavior may continue to occur. (Interested readers are encouraged to consult Web sites listed under “gender education” to better understand developments in this rapidly changing field.)

And rapidly changing it is, indeed. Consider our understanding of chromosomes, which radically changed the field but then itself underwent great changes in the light of further research. Originally, it was assumed that there were two chromosomes, X and Y. If the egg was fertilized with an X chromosome, the fetus was a female (XX), and, if it was fertilized with a Y chromosome, it was a male (XY). Soon it became clear that the situation was much more complicated. There are conditions in which individuals have the combinations XXX, XYY, a single X, or a single Y chromosome (though the last is not viable).

The most radical change of all—and one of the most controversial—was noted by Money. He found that hermaphrodites who were raised as boys chose to remain boys. This challenged the idea that sex was immutable, and ultimately led to large numbers of people undergoing transsexual surgery. One case involving Money demonstrated that such surgery could be unexpectedly complicated. Under Money’s authority, surgery was arranged for a twin boy whose penis had been accidentally destroyed during circumcision. The boy was unsuccessfully raised as a girl but

“... as the findings of such research broaden public understandings about gender, radical changes in public behavior may continue to occur.”

was later changed back into a boy. The outcome was a disaster. This leaves a question that has not yet been answered: how simple or complicated is it to change sex? Since transsexual surgery has many complications, there is no easy recommendation to give to parents of hermaphrodites. **ff**

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Vern L. Bullough died on June 21, 2006. He was an award-winning sex researcher, author, and academician. He served on the board of the Council for Secular Humanism and the secretariat of the International Academy of Humanism. This article was originally prepared as a talk Dr. Bullough delivered during the Center for Inquiry’s cruise to Alaska, shortly before his death.

TIBOR R. MACHAN

Altruism's Bad Influence

Putting it plainly, altruism is very popular, at least in theory. It's not so popular in practice, because, well, altruism is impossible to practice consistently. As the poet W.H. Auden put it, "We are here on earth to do good for others. What the others are here for, I don't know."

In reality, what people much more reasonably support is benevolence, generosity, and kindness, all in the right measure and not to a fault. It shows in what they do, not in what they say. Unselfishness—closely associated with altruism—may be advocated, but it is hardly ever practiced. That's because unselfishness means first devoting oneself to other people—not just loved ones and in proper proportion, but to all and all of the time. This is impossible.

Yet the ideal of altruism is championed and heavily promoted, despite being impossible to realize. For example, business ethics (in which I do much work) teems with theorists who preach the altruist line. They call it the "stakeholder theory." The idea is that, when company officers make their decisions, they ought to keep in mind not shareholders—those for whom they work, the owners of the firm—but all those who have an interest in it, the stakeholders. Thus, instead of nurturing the company's bottom line and making it prosper, managers are supposed to give priority to these other, stakeholding individuals' well-being.

Take a company that may stay afloat and be profitable only by moving from an expensive plant to one that is more affordable. Should it make the move? The shareholder theorists would advise: "Of course, move, since that will keep the company solvent and may even bring in a



profit." Stakeholder theorists, however, will argue: "Keep in mind all those in the neighborhood who depend on the presence of the firm, like the dry cleaner or the restaurant patronized by employees. If the plant is moved, they will suffer. So, don't move."

One cannot run a business this way. The small gym that I have been using for two years just decided that it must move because the rent—driven, incidentally, by abruptly higher tax assessments—increased beyond its means. So now it is moving and will be too far away for me to visit. And what about the various nearby establishments patronized by gym members who will lose their business? Stakeholder theorists, as altruists, advocate that the gym should think of me and these establishments and not leave us in the lurch. Never mind that the owners of the gym will be driven out of business by such a decision.

The circumstances of my little gym are duplicated all over the business world. Yet instead of urging managers to move their facilities to obtain affordable rent or other benefits, most business ethicists—advocates of the social responsibility of corporations—are telling managers that they have an obligation to take care of the stakeholders.

Nor is this an idea urged on managers as a matter of their free choice. No, the stakeholder theory is actually being promoted as the basis of public policy and even of laws. For example, in various states, so-called hostile takeovers are legally prohibited, even though the takeovers would be very friendly to the owners of the firms involved. Why? Because it is regarded as selfish for managers of companies to serve those who hired them instead of adjacent interested parties who have grown to expect the benefits the companies bring to the region.

Human beings in all walks of life ought to try to flourish. This includes being considerate, first of all, of their own well-being and that of their intimates—family and friends. Then follows kindness and generosity to deserving strangers in need. Last come those people with whom we have no personal contact but who have been hit with some disaster, such as a tsunami or a hurricane.

The altruistic ideal that our lives must be primarily devoted to others is a good example of the "perfect" being the enemy of the good. This standard for "proper" human behavior—"[of] assuming a duty to relieve the distress and promote the happiness of our fellows . . . to . . . maintain quite simply that a man may and should discount altogether his own pleasure or happiness as such when he is deciding what course of action to pursue," to quote the philosopher W.G. MacLagan's characterization of altruism—is very bad advice. But it has been repeated by moralists mainly because it has the ring of sociability about it. Yet, it undermines even that, since, if one runs oneself or one's business into the ground, there will no longer be any chance of serving anyone's interest. ■■

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R. JOSEPH HOFFMANN

Spiritual Libertarians

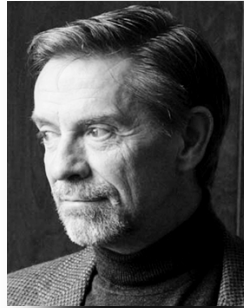
A little philosophy inclineth man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds back to religion.

— Sir Francis Bacon

Two books published in the same year tell the sad tales of the death of faith and the death of atheism. In ringing out the old order, a pugnacious but academically naïve observer of popular culture and religious politics, Sam Harris (*The End of Faith*, 2004), diagnoses religion as the root of all evil. In his calculation, the most liberal of gay bishops and the most censorious, West-hating mullah are equally part of a problem that can be cured with a large dose of unbelief. It is an old argument: there is more evidence for Santa Claus than there is for God, and in both cases the evidence is provided by those who want to believe childish things and bake the cookies themselves.

One of the traits of believing in childish things is the disposition to defend such beliefs childishly—violently—as we witness now in the reddening tantrums of offended Muslim faithful, who can't stop to ask how a puerile and not very amusing “caricature” can amount to a “representation” of an unknown semblance. But, on balance, Harris is more wrong than right, since, if it is true that there are no gradations in religious toxicity, there should be no gradations in secularism, morality, gender, quality of prose, or love—or anything else that defines human culture.

But there are. Just as there are degrees of immaturity, there are degrees of religious maturity, and as Harris's nemesis, Professor Alister McGrath of Oxford, observed in his dirge for modern unbelief (*The Twilight of Atheism*, 2004), sometimes atheists behave as intolerantly, speciously, illogically, and childishly as any born-again Bible-beating fundamentalist. McGrath professes



to have once gone through an atheist “phase,” though his recovery curve is surely miraculous. Like many born-again theologians, he is quietly thankful that his inauspicious beginnings led him (like Dawkins) to Oxford, to enlightenment, and from science to Divinity, where he now serves as a Templeton favorite son in the cause of religio-scientific rapprochement. McGrath's approach to people like Harris would be pastoral, sympathetic, embracing.

Harris, as a neo-atheist with self-described spirituality-training, represents a square beyond the secular atheism of, say, a Sidney Hook or a Paul Kurtz. Harris confuses us with defined borders. When is an atheist not an atheist? When he thinks the end of faith is the beginning of religion. But for McGrath, the key to the problem of modern atheism is that it is superficial, dogmatic, and repetitive, whereas the atheism of the good old days was profound, vehement, spacious, and original. Also, it was often English—though he does seem to know a name or two from outside the British Isles—that circumscribes most of his knowledge of the movement.

Reading the two books as a set, one can be forgiven for asking: what time is it—lights out for belief, or the dawn of a new age of faith? Perhaps neither.

While Harris propounds notions of “atheist spirituality” and McGrath intones a *dies irae* over a tomb for which there is no corpse, the whole debate has changed trains. And it is a change that will affect the recruitment efforts of believers and nonbelievers alike, a beyond-Gen-X noncommittalism that I hereby christen (or equivalently sprinkle) Spiritual Libertarianism.

“SLs” are not dualists. Good and evil are full of ambiguity—like life. They are not precisely atheists and not (exactly) religious either. The adherents are mainly young, well-educated or intellectually curious, devoted to animation of all sorts, and have learned history from having read fantasy well into college. They are the children of postmodern anti-historicism and antiscience. Their patron literary saints are Neil Gaiman, who writes about grails in pawnshops; Philip Pullman, who imagines antireligion religion within the human spirit; Susanne Cooper, of *Bogart* fame; and Diana Wynne Jones, whose hero, Christopher Chant, has become in her latest fantasy the enchanter Chrestomanci. They dislike the Christian overtones and unsubtle dualism of a C. S. Lewis or a J.R.R. Tolkien, which accounts for the popularity of J.K. Rowling among the youngest of their set. They embrace moral complexity and are relatively cynical about religion in general, but they hold to the belief that there is a spiritual core to life, the universe, or *something*.

SLs are on the Web more than they use printed matter. They are smart, like Jeff Sharlet, whose webzine (available at <http://www.killingthebuddha.com>) and book by the same name (*Killing the Buddha*, 2004) are constructed as anti-dogmatist oases “for people made anxious by churches, people embarrassed to be caught in the ‘spirituality’ section of a bookstore, people both hostile and drawn to talk of God. It is for people who somehow want to be religious, who want to know what it means to know the divine, but for good reasons are not and do not.” According to Sharlet, “If the religious have come to own religious discourse it is

because they alone have had places where religious language could be spoken and understood. Now there is a forum for the supposedly nonreligious to think and talk about what religion is, is not and might be. Killing the Buddha is it." The name derives from a Zen proverb about a monk who was threatened with complacency following his belief that he had "discovered" an all-encompassing truth—the Buddha-knowledge, "the big pay-off." Told by his master to "kill [this] Buddha" because such certainty could only impede the spiritual quest for truth, the monk is dismayed, and then realizes that meaning is process, not conclusion.

Sharlet has diagnosed the SL phenomenon: "I do see a slightly ridiculous alt country strand running through it all. The Louvin Brothers, especially, are patron saints. It's an uneasily urban bunch, drawn to cities like all intellectuals. Its strongest religious feeder faiths are leftist Catholicism and Jewishness, if not Judaism. Buddhism is something else altogether—too often, too earnest. Protestants of this ilk often end up retreating into anti-capitalist conservative orthodoxy, à la *The New Panta-gruel*."

Or take the equally cynical *Society of Mutual Autopsy*, named after a group of combative French anthropologists of the

late nineteenth century who espoused scientific atheism in society, morality, and culture. SOMA consists mainly of essays written by a small circle of contributing editors and is fronted by the impressive prose talents of John Spalding and Mary Beth Crain. Spalding, a once-born Catholic who survived an evangelical childhood to escape into Episcopalian Christianity, is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School and a relentless foe of what he calls "inauthentic" (read: cheap, evangelical, dogmatic) faith. Crain describes herself as a "born Jew, born-again Buddhist/Native American with a healthy respect for Jesus and anybody else who's willing to die for the jerks who killed him, and love them too." As with Killing the Buddha, the essays in SOMA are often topical and sometimes personal or anecdotal: the equivalent of a "testimony" to being unborn again, or being reborn to a more penetrating or critical "faith." In a recent issue, Crain describes her eighty-five-year-old Jewish mother's receiving Communion in a rest home in Rochester.

In the March 21 issue, Jason Byassee responds to a book by Miroslav Volf that redefines the Trinity as "a pattern for human relationships and Christology as a source for rethinking enemy-forgiveness and for rethinking politics in the wake of unspeakable violence." The sites are

slick, the readers accustomed to a potent blend of cynicism toward traditional religious ideologies and inspirational stories about how to find little gods (a little good?) in everything.

Self-described as the last stop in religionless ideology is Universism (<http://universist.org/about.htm>), "the long-awaited dawn of postmodern religion—religion in the first person. We're about living creatively, free from universal truths." Where KtB and SOMA are often clever and ironic, Universism is bold, banal, and blue. Its Web site screams at you with the unmerited self-confidence of a founder who really believes he has the spiritual solution for you. The answer? "We encourage Questions about such heretofore unthought of head-scratchers as 'What is the meaning of life?' 'Where am I going?' and 'Does God exist?'" These unexacting queries, posed by founder Ford Vox, the self-appointed guru who earnestly seems to believe that he has stumbled onto finality, culminate in this helpful statement: "Universism is a religious philosophy that celebrates the mystery surrounding us. Universists don't pretend we have the answers, and we celebrate that fact! As Universists we do our best to seek answers, and the first step in our process of discovery is recognizing what

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we do not know. Our philosophy unites individuals who have held a wide variety of freethought perspectives along with those who consider themselves spiritual."

If KtB and SOMA provide well-written and thoughtful articles—whatever their merits as theology and philosophy—Universism offers only itself, the evolved form of humanism, deism, and free-thought, of which all previous examples are incomplete and unworthy predecessors. To understand Universism as the self-professed "fulfillment" of secularism with value-added spirituality is to understand Islam in relation to Judaism and Christianity.

Is the growth of the SL movement a good thing, a bad thing, or just a thing? Reflect on the fact that it all boils down to you—your good or bad religious experiences, your gnawing search for meaning, your inability to find relief through the

traditional avenues of church, pastoral, and sacramental care. In one sense, spiritual libertarians are unbelievers: they do not believe in much, or any, religious dogma; they are not perplexed by theological controversies; their social ethics are up for grabs or persuasion. But in other respects, SLs believe too much. In their search for a meaning that "transcends" the material and physical world, they run the risk of transforming personal experience into a kind of ego-mysticism that equates the personal with the transcendent. In this vaguely religious universe, "God" by any name other than "God" is cynical, shares your sense of humor, is variously ironic and disapproving (like you) towards a world in which humans only screw things up through war and poor planning, and would abolish religion if he wasn't (like you) so darned nice. This God invites you to skepticism about his existence at a minimum,

maximally toward disbelief. And that's OK too: it's a real spiritual awakening. To the extent that this isn't about God, exactly, it looks like atheism. To the extent that it's about something that gives you a suitably "lite" equivalent for the God you don't want, it's spiritual. Religion meets South Beach.

The growth of SL must be taken seriously, because it may signal the growth of a new kind of unreason of which fundamentalism is the blunt opposite. At the same time, SLs should take seriously the real possibility that the growth of their movement, like the growth of existentialism, will result in what Sartre predicted for his own philosophy: a cause so inclusive that it means what anybody wants it to mean, and thus means nothing at all. **fi**

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BARBARA SMOKER

Should We Respect Religion?

On May 25, 2006, I took part in the Oxford University Union Debate, opposing the motion that "Free speech should be moderated by respect for religion." The chief speaker on my side was Flemming Rose, the Danish editor who published the controversial Muhammad cartoons. As there is a seven-figure bounty on his head, the security arrangements for the debate were heavy. Everyone was searched on the way in. In the days when, as president of the National Secular Society, I frequently took part in university debates (mainly during the 1970s through the 1990s). I was almost invariably on the losing side when it came to the vote, but this time we won by a good margin—129–59.



If the word *religion* in the motion were replaced by any other abstract noun, we would have won by 188 to nil. Suppose the word was *science*. The motion would then have read "Free

"Should we, then, respect religious faith? Certainly not. But should we respect religious people? Yes—as long as they are not antisocial and do not aim to impose their religious views on others."

speech should be moderated by respect for science"; and no reasonable person would vote for that—least of all a genuine scientist. So why is religion given its uniquely privileged status? After thousands of years, it is the norm—so no one ever thinks it needs justifying.

“There can be no real freedom of religion without freedom *from* religion, which is part of the whole concept of free speech. As J.S. Mill wrote, no idea can be justified unless it is open to opposition—which means free speech and free expression.”

As I pointed out in the debate, the precept to respect religion is similar to the Mosaic commandment, “Honor thy Father and thy Mother.” But suppose your father and mother happened to be

murderers? They wouldn’t deserve your respect, and most religions don’t either.

Should we, then, respect religious faith? Certainly not. But should we respect religious people? Yes—as long as they are not antisocial and do not aim to impose their religious views on others.

However, even if we respect them as good-living people, we cannot respect their beliefs. Faith, which means firm belief in the absence of evidence, betrays human intelligence, undermines science-based knowledge, and compromises ordinary morality. If there were objective evidence for its doctrines, it would no longer be faith; it would be knowledge.

We have to excuse the medieval skeptics who pretended to respect Christianity rather than risk being burned at the stake, and likewise the apostate Muslims of today who pay lip-service to Islam in those Islamic countries where apostasy is still a capital offense; but we who live in a comparatively liberal society have no such excuse. In fact, it is all the more incumbent upon us to give our support to victims of religious oppression everywhere by coming out of the respectful closet and speaking our minds. Freedom of

speech is more important than respect.

Skepticism is of paramount importance, because it is the gateway to knowledge; but unless the skeptical ideas are freely argued over, they cannot be assessed, nor can the ensuing knowledge spread through society.

There can be no real freedom of religion without freedom *from* religion, which is part of the whole concept of free speech. As J.S. Mill wrote, no idea can be justified unless it is open to opposition—which means free speech and free expression. And free speech must include the right to laugh at absurd ideas. Indeed, ridicule—including satirical cartoons—has always been an important element of the free exchange of ideas on everything, not least religion. Without that free exchange, there can be no advance in knowledge and no social progress.

Totalitarian extremists, of whatever religion or sect, invariably put faith first and freedom nowhere. Censorship, including insidious self-censorship, is then the order of the day, followed closely by violence. In a society where religious orthodoxy rules, there is no freedom of religion.

Incidentally, the violence provoked by the Danish cartoons was deliberately stirred up by Islamic extremists publishing exaggerated versions of them in Muslim countries, up to four months after the originals were published.

I have discussed this with several moderate Muslims, and while they roundly condemned the violent reprisals, they generally added, “But people ought not to insult religion.” Why *not*? No one would denounce the ridiculing of *political* views, which are open to free debate. In fact, *true* respect for religion would allow it to be opened up in the same way, relying on the truth emerging. But at present it is shielded from honest scrutiny. This suggests that the faithful realize it could not stand up to it.

We are told by politicians and mealy-mouthed functionaries that it is politically incorrect to call the perpetrators of the July 7, 2005, bombings in London Muslim terrorists—but, of course, everyone knows they *were* Muslims, of the most zealous kind. Their belief in a blissful afterlife for martyrs is another aspect of the problem, and, since this afterlife



belief is unshakable, what we need perhaps is a revered ayatollah to proclaim, with Qur'anic support, that suicide bombers will actually go to hell (or, at least, that paradise has run out of virgins).

Though we must take care to avoid a native backlash against the mostly peaceable British Muslim community, succeeding governments have carried the exoneration of Muslim villains too far in the past. For instance, as long ago as 1989, when imams were offering bribes on BBC television for the murder of Salman Rushdie, they were never charged with incitement to murder.

The July 7 suicide bombers were British-born Muslim youths, three of whom—all found dead—were quickly identified. At least one of them used to attend the Finsbury Park Mosque, where Abu Hamza was knowingly allowed, for eight years, to preach violent hatred and incite young men to murder, before the Crown Prosecution Service started criminal proceedings against him in 2004—and only then because the United States was demanding his extradition to their country to be tried for crimes against it.

The word *appeasement* is rarely used except in the context of Neville Chamberlain's deal with Hitler in 1938, but what about the present appeasement of Muslims in Britain?

It is obviously impossible to genuinely respect an ideology that our reason rejects as superstition, let alone *dangerous* superstition; so what the motion that we should respect it actually means is that we should *pretend* to respect religion for the sake of political correctness. Thus, at the very least, the motion that I was debating in Oxford demands hypocrisy.

But hypocrisy is not the worst of it.

When the ideologies that we pretend to respect are allowed to indoctrinate children, some of whom may even grow up to be suicide bombers because of it, hypocrisy becomes complicity in the mental abuse of children, the oppression of women, and even incitement to terrorism. This has been exacerbated by our political representatives, for the sake of votes, setting up state-supported schools to promote indoctrination in a particular faith, though they themselves probably accept a different, incompatible set of superstitions.

We are told that Islam itself cannot be blamed for the terrorists' attacks on New York, Madrid, and London, followed by widespread carnage in retaliation for the publication of a few innocuous drawings. That is like saying that the horrors of the Inquisition had nothing to do with Christianity.

In the Gospels, Jesus consistently identifies righteousness with *believing* in him; and in the ages of faith the statement by Thomas Aquinas that "Unbelief is the greatest of sins" was incontrovertible. Hence, the Inquisition, the Crusades, and the Christian burning of witches, heretics, and Jews—the flames being fanned by Christian faith.

This use of torture was not a case of bad people perverting a good religion; the persecution of skeptics follows logically from the Christian correlation of faith with salvation, not to mention the scary notion that God could punish the whole of society for the disbelief of a few.

Muhammad followed on from Jesus, and the Qur'an contains even more manic denunciations of disbelief than the New Testament. Moreover, Islam has failed to moderate its cruel practices to the extent that mainstream Christianity has done in the past couple of centuries.

The Taliban, Al Qaeda, and Iraq's Badr Corps (commanded by that country's Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution) are certainly extremist, but they are orthodox—deriving logically from the Qur'an, which denigrates women and tells believers to wage *jihad* against heretics and infidels. Moderate Muslims may explain it away as misinterpretation—but why, then, did Allah or his Prophet lapse into ambiguity? Even the two major Islamic sects, Shia and Sunni, are at each other's throats in Iraq and elsewhere.

Muslims, we are told, are sensitive and are really hurt when their religion is joked about. Don't they credit their supposed creator god with any sense of humor? Didn't he actually invent laughter? And is he too weak to withstand a joke without some humorless cleric rushing to his defense? Or is their own faith so weak that they fear its contamination? Let them heed the old playground retort: "Sticks and stones may

“... ridicule—including satirical cartoons—has always been an important element of the free exchange of ideas on everything, not least religion.”

break my bones, but words can never hurt me.”

Claiming to be ultrasensitive and really hurt by mere words or pictures is, of course, a way of gaining privilege. Everyone else has to speak softly so as not to hurt you.

It is argued that, since the common-law offense of blasphemy survives in Britain, though only for the protection of the doctrines of the Church of England, parity demands that the law be extended to protect other religions. But it is now practically a dead letter, and the best solution would clearly be to abolish it altogether; as, in fact, the Law Commission has recommended several times to succeeding governments, the ears of which are more deaf even than those of a person my age. But now the concept of blasphemy has been given an *independent* lease of life by renaming it “disrespect for religious feelings.”

Our present government has even endeavored to criminalize such disrespect with another change of name, “incitement to religious hatred”; but, fortunately, ameliorating amendments to the relevant bill introduced in the House of Lords were finally accepted in the Commons—by just a single vote, when Blair himself was absent—on January 31 this year. But the attenuated bill then became law.

Of course, the law should protect *people*—in fact, that is basically what



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law is all about—and we have plenty of general laws for the protection of people, without special laws for the protection of *ideas* of a particular kind.

On February 20, Pope Benedict XVI called for mutual respect for all the world religions and their symbols—though he failed to mention, of course, parallel respect for atheism.

Anyway, how can the pope sincerely respect Islam when it teaches that believers in the “blasphemous” Christian Trinity are destined to spend eternity in hell? Not to mention that the death sentence is often passed in Muslim countries, to this day, on anyone who converts from Islam to Christianity.

The *fatwa* recently issued by Shia Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani states not only that all homosexuals should be killed but that they should be killed in the “most severe way” possible. By comparison, Pope Benedict’s homophobia is quite restrained.

Pressured by religious leaders sinking their differences in the common cause of authoritarianism, the Council of Europe is currently considering the introduction of legislation in the European Parliament and even the United Nations to enforce “respect for religious feelings” internationally.

Insertion of the word *feelings* lends this tendentious goal a semblance of humane empathy. But religion cannot, in all conscience, be intellectually respected if honesty is to prevail over hypocrisy—and giving it false respect would not just be obsequious and dishonest, but it would actually allow superstitions of the Dark Ages to triumph, destroying the whole range of social and individual freedoms courageously won over the past few centuries.

So, for the sake of liberty as well as truth, we must resist the indefensible furtherance of hypocritical respect. Far from being willing to moderate free speech by respect for religion, we should moderate respect for religion in favor of free speech. **ff**

Barbara Smoker was president of Britain’s National Secular Society. She was recently honored with a lifetime achievement award for Distinguished Services to Humanism.



Introduction

Nathan Bupp

Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.

—George Bernard Shaw

Secular humanists are committed to a naturalistic view of the universe. Concomitant with this is the realization that each of us gets only one chance to build a meaningful and fulfilling life—there is only one ride on this merry-go-round. For most humanists, this is a sobering thought, which leads to a fervent commitment to the cultivation of the good life—*here and now*—both on an individual basis and in society at large.

For the secular humanist, a sober analysis of the traits of nature is in order: What are the conditions of the good life? What limitations might we find in nature, and what possible flowerings and dispensations might we hope for? In the personal search for answers to these questions, it might be the better part of wisdom to be fortified by what George Santayana called “the Aristotelian principle,” that is, a conception of human nature in which “everything ideal has a natural basis and everything natural an ideal development.” These ideals can be discovered and cultivated in science, art, and society. One of the most attractive and compelling ideals that humans can pursue is the actualization of one’s own latent talents and capabilities. This notion was the stirring impetus behind a whole string of humanistic psychologists, from Carl Rogers to Abraham Maslow to Albert Ellis, and also behind Paul Kurtz’s idea of “the courage to become.”

John Dewey, perhaps the leading naturalistic humanist of the

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twentieth century, was deeply committed to the realization of goodness and beauty—the “consummations” of existence, as he called them. Dewey believed that the search for such ends should be rooted in experience—bio-

logical and environmental realities, discoverable by means continuous with scientific inquiry. Viewed in this light, the “science of happiness”—or *positive psychology*, as it has come to be known—can be seen as *the humanistic inquiry par excellence*.

The vast majority of the work being done in the field of positive psychology has been thoroughly humanistic. In reading the literature, we have been particularly excited to see the convergence between what humanist philosophy has traditionally said about human happiness and what research has discovered empirically. Most striking, in particular, is the relation of Aristotle and many other classical humanists to empirical evidence borne out by the science of happiness. Concepts such as “flow,” “emotional intelligence,” and “authentic happiness” all explicitly harken back to classical humanistic conceptions of the good life—hence FREE INQUIRY’s decision to take a closer look at this field.

The project of self-formation—of treating one’s self as a conscious and personal creation—is attractive to many, if not most, humanists. Knowledge and wisdom are essential in this process. We are extremely fortunate to be alive at a time in history when we have at our disposal such powerful streams of humane information: the rich fund of philosophical wisdom drawn from the ages, augmented and informed by the profound insights garnered from modern science. This has led to an incredibly exciting convergence of knowledge, a new kind of *scientific wisdom*. Humanists, eager to apply such wisdom to life *as lived*, can find themselves the lucky beneficiaries of the fruits of this convergence.

Ultimately, it is up to each of us to carve out a happy and meaningful life—*life as a work of art*—for as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi stated so eloquently in his work, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, “Happiness is a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person.” We hope that the articles presented in this special section in FREE INQUIRY will contribute in no small measure to this lifelong task. ■■

God, Aristotle, and the New Science of Happiness

Ken Livingston



There is no satisfying the senses, not even with a shower of money. "The senses are of slight pleasure and really suffering." When a wise man has realized this, he takes no pleasure, as a disciple of the Buddhas, even in the pleasures of heaven.

—*Siddharta Gautama (Buddha)*

Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence.

—*Aristotle*

O Lord, by your hand save me from such men, from men of this world whose reward is in this life.

—*Psalms 17:14*

At least since antiquity, people have been faced with a choice between two different views of how they should conceive of themselves and the lives they lead. One might choose to treat this life as but a few droplets in the vast ocean of time, a vale of tears to be transcended if one is fortunate enough to live rightly. Alternatively, one might decide that this life, this measurable and all-too-brief span of self-awareness, is all one has or will ever have, so it would be best to make the most of it by living rightly.

Both perspectives offer a challenge to live rightly, to live a good life, but judgments about whether the challenge is met vary according to the claimed significance of this life. For those who would transcend the natural span of life, it is necessary to live in accordance with principles revealed in mysterious, ineffable ways to authoritative figures who speak on behalf of transcendent beings or forces. Different versions of the supernatural view differ in many particulars, but they share a common conviction that suffering is the norm and happiness is but a fleeting experience best achieved in the joy of living according to God's or the gods' wishes. When worldly desire conflicts with heavenly principle, it is heaven that rules the day, even if the result is still more suffering and unhappiness in this life. As the story of Job teaches us, a truly good man should gladly accept even the most extreme suffering if the suffering comes as a consequence of obedience to and unquestioning worship of his God.

For the *naturalist*, a term I use in the broadest possible sense, living rightly is judged very differently. To know how to live rightly, one must discover what kind of animal man is and from this foundation go on to discover what mode of living will produce a life of meaning and purpose—Aristotle's life of happiness. It is very important to emphasize that Aristotle is by no means endor-

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ing simple hedonism. The goal is not to measure how well life is going by toting up the number of pleasurable minutes experienced in a day. Aristotle explicitly rejects this view. The Greek word he uses is *eudaimonia*, and, although it is often translated as meaning “happiness,” it comes closer to capturing his meaning to use a word like *flourishing*, which conveys a sense of activity rather than state of mind. Living rightly means acquiring those virtues that allow one to maximize one’s potential as a rational creature, producing a state of overall well-being and satisfaction with the life one leads.

Oddly enough, the new sciences of mind born at the end of the nineteenth century in the United States and Europe seemed, until recently, to side with those who see life as an unpleasant affair and human nature itself as the culprit. One might have expected these naturalists to take Aristotle’s side in the dispute, but instead, the still-young sciences of mind have devoted far more time, energy, and ink to human suffering, distress, and failure than to the study of joy, resilience, and success. So one-sided has the balance been that the proverbial Martian visitor perusing our journals and books of psychology for hints as to the nature of humanity would likely conclude that it is a wonder that we manage to have any sort of civilization at all, so wide-ranging is our misery, irrationality, and pathology.

The mindless mechanisms of the behaviorists who dominated American academic psychology for most of the twentieth century have a great deal to do with this imbalance. The very idea of subjective well-being is anathema to one who thinks the mind is out of bounds for the researcher; that is, of course, if “mind” is more than a figment of the imagination in the first place. Even more telling was the insinuation into Western popular culture of the dreary, disconsolate view of humanity promulgated by Freud and his heirs. Animated by these views of our basic nature as human beings, a growing list of private foundations and government agencies exaggerated the trend by shifting the bulk of their funding to the study of human pathology. So extreme was this move that psychologist Martin Seligman quipped that “the National Institute of Mental Health . . . should . . . more appropriately be renamed the National Institute of Mental Illness.” The Aristotelian project of discovering the conditions that promote *eudaimonia* was lost in the shuffle to enumerate the heartaches and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to.

Of course, there have been exceptions along the way, researchers more in tune with Aristotle’s concern for the conditions that promote human well-being and satisfaction with life. Most notable among these were the humanistic psychologists who came of age in the maelstrom of World War II, where the suffering wrought by the war was accompanied by countless examples of heroism, survival, and triumphant achieve-

ment in response to that suffering. Observing such resilience led to a number of new perspectives on the human condition. Abraham Maslow rediscovered and elaborated the idea of self-actualization. Albert Ellis elevated the human capacity for reason and choice above the power of habit and conditioning.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi uncovered important principles that underlie human creativity and the profound experiences of satisfaction and joy that accompany the achievement of excellence. Each of these reprises a central Aristotelian theme. Each focuses on the seeking after a meaningful life in this world. And for a very long time, their influence on the field was small indeed.

Part of the reason for this is that the humanistic psychologists were better clinicians and theoreticians than they were experimentalists. (For example, Maslow began his career as a hardcore behaviorist working with primates, so he knew well whereof he wrote when he criticized that approach to understanding human beings. But he never found a consistent way to fuse the hard-headed empiricism of his youth with the humanism of his later life, and because of that he was largely ignored outside schools of clinical and personality psychology.) Quite appropriately, the embrace of the scientific method by the cognitive sciences demanded evidence in support of the humanists’ calls to reconsider our view of human nature. Unfortunately, such evidence as was forthcoming often lacked the rigor demanded by researchers in the academy. The apparent soft-mindedness of the approach made it easy for a variety of so-called

New Age movements to expropriate many of its key ideas and terms, further diminishing its status in academic circles. Gradually, however, the rigors of hardheaded empiricism have crept into the field, and the once-lonely voices speaking on behalf of a psychology of well-being, achievement, and happiness have become a chorus. Organized under the banner of *positive psychology*, a term introduced by Martin Seligman when he inaugurated the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, researchers are generating new findings about the conditions for human happiness at an ever-accelerating rate.

RELIGION AND THE NEW SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS

One seeming irony of the resurgence of interest in understanding the conditions for happiness is the role played by religiously inclined scholars in promoting such research. In spite of the emphasis in traditional religious texts on the rewards of the next life in opposition to those available in this world,

“... the new sciences of mind born at the end of the nineteenth century in the United States and Europe seemed, until recently, to side with those who see life as an unpleasant affair and human nature itself as the culprit.”

claims of a positive relationship between happiness and success on the one hand and religious participation on the other have become commonplace in recent years. More often than not, this association is presented with the strong suggestion that a religious life is the *cause* of well-being, happiness, and success. Does this association really exist? Does being religious cause one to be happier and more successful? Have the religiously minded really embraced an Aristotelian view of the goals and purposes of life? As usual, when science is applied to things as complicated as human beings, the answer comes with plenty of qualifiers.

A quick look through the literature on the relationship between religion and measures of positive life outcomes reveals just the kind of inconsistency in results that frustrates the casual reader. For every study that reports a positive association, one can find another that reports either no relationship at all or even the suggestion that being more religious is associated with being more unhappy or less satisfied with life. How is one to make sense of these varied results? One strategy for organizing this mass of information is to perform what is known as a meta-analysis of multiple studies. This is done by assembling as complete a set of studies as possible according to various criteria, excluding those with obvious methodological flaws, and then converting the findings of all studies in the set to a common statistical measure. The usual choice is something known as “effect size,” a statistical estimate of the degree to which two variables are actually related to each other. Once the data from all the studies have been converted to a common metric, they can be analyzed for trends across the whole set of studies.

Charles Hackney and Glenn Sanders, working at the State University of New York at Albany, provide an excellent example of just such an analysis. And they do so in a way that helps to clarify just how complicated both religion and happiness are. Their first analysis looks at the trend in 264 different effect sizes taken from thirty-five distinct studies and finds an overall positive association between religiosity and measures of well-being. Some of those effects, seventy-eight to be exact, are negative, meaning that greater religiosity is associated with reduced well-being, but the rest are positive. The advantage of the meta-analytic technique is that we can summarize this pattern quantitatively, and what Hackney and Sanders discovered is that, across all of these studies, there is a positive relationship between religiosity and well-being. The negative relationships are too weak to offset the greater number of positive relationships in the set taken as a whole. Furthermore, the relationship is statistically significant, that is, not likely to have occurred by chance. It is, however, not a large effect. Even if one assumes that religiosity is the direct cause of positive psychological outcomes, something that is, strictly speaking, not legitimate on the basis of these data alone, it would account for only 1 percent of the variation in those positive outcomes.

This positive but very weak association is typical of that found in similar summary reviews. But Hackney and Sanders go on to probe more deeply into the patterns in their data, encouraged by the fact that their statistical analyses suggest that there is far more variation between studies in their sample than one would expect by chance alone. When this pattern

is observed in a meta-analysis, it suggests that the different studies included in the analysis are not all measuring the same things, even if they use the same labels to describe them. In this case, we have to worry that the different studies are not all measuring the same things when they attempt to quantify religiosity and well-being. By a careful series of increasingly specific analyses, Hackney and Sanders measured the relationships between particular measures of religiosity and different ways of measuring psychological outcomes. They were able to show that how strong the relationship is depends very much on how the variables are measured. If religiosity is measured by questions about personal devotion and commitment, the effects are larger than when they are measured by things like frequency of church attendance. Similarly, if the psychological measures capture things like self-actualization, the relationship to religiosity is stronger than it is when using measures like amount of distress experienced in life. In fact, these trends interact, so that the strongest relationships are found in studies that measure psychological outcomes like self-actualization in relation to religiosity measures of a more personal, less institutional variety: strong personal devotion to one's religion is associated with a greater likelihood of feeling self-actualized. In these cases, the relationship may account for as much as 10 percent of the variance. At the other extreme, institutional or ideological measures of religiosity don't seem to be related to things like distress at all.

Two important conclusions can be drawn from research of this kind. First, measures matter. Saying that being religious contributes to positive well-being is nearly meaningless unless one knows precisely what is meant by *religious* and *well-being*. Second, even in cases where the relationship is strongest, a great deal remains unexplained; the effect sizes are not very large. More worrisome still is Hackney and Sanders's acknowledgement that none of their more specific analyses succeeded in eliminating the heterogeneity in the variance they measured. What that means is that there are still factors unaccounted for in their classifications of study measures.

This last conclusion leads quickly to the hypothesis that the association between religion and happiness or well-being is actually not owing to religion directly but instead is the result of some other factor that mediates between the two. If this factor is not being measured but does vary across studies, then it might account for some of the heterogeneity that remains among studies. For example, one might hypothesize that being well integrated into a network of caring people promotes happiness both by the rewards that come directly from friendship and by the buffering effect of close friends and family when difficulties arise in life. If being an active participant in a religious community increases the depth and breadth of one's social network, it might show up as a correlate of greater well-being, but the mediating and more immediate cause of that well-being would be perfectly mundane social relationships.

The kind of research required to tease out such mediating variables is difficult, time consuming, and, therefore, rare, but there are a few tantalizing examples. An examination of one recent study of this kind appeared in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. It is particularly interesting because it was conducted in Israel with a sample of people half



of whom described themselves as secular rather than religious. This provides for a larger range of religiosity than is typical of similar research in the United States. This greater range has some important statistical advantages that increase confidence in the findings. Study authors Noa Vilchinsky and Shlomo Kravetz measured levels of distress and psychological well-being over the preceding month, level of engagement in religious ritual, degree of perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others, Jewish identity, fear of death, and also demographic variables like age, sex, marital status, education, and occupation. Last but not least, they also measured the degree to which people see their lives as being organized around a system of goals and a coherent worldview, as well as the extent to which they perceive themselves as fulfilling those goals and living according to that worldview. They summarize this final measure as the extent to which people see their lives as meaningful.

Over six hundred people, roughly equally divided between men and women and ranging in age from eighteen to thirty-five, took part in the study. Vilchinsky and Kravetz subjected the resulting mass of data to a statistical procedure known as path analysis in an effort to understand the full range of interconnections among their measures. Path analysis goes beyond calculating the set of all possible correlations and tries to find the structure of relationships among the variables that best fits the data actually collected. In this case, the largest portion of the variation in well-being and levels of distress is explained by a model with a path from religious belief to meaning in life and then from meaning in life to well-being and level of distress (more meaning, less distress). Religious behavior did not help to predict these outcomes, and level of social support did not mediate the effect either. The authors suggest that the failure to find a social-mediation effect may be because such effects only occur in Christian samples, a suggestion that reminds us not to assume that all religious systems are psychologically equivalent (as if we didn't already have enough to worry about).

The results of this study teach us several valuable lessons. First, it is important to note that the study authors did not explore all the possible models connecting their variables. The model that best fit the data has a kind of surface plausibility, but as Vilchinsky and Kravetz themselves note, they did not test models in which the direction of causation runs the other way, from well-being to religiosity. This highlights the fact, mentioned previously, that research of this kind is correlational only. One needs good, long-term, developmental research to establish causality. Unfortunately, we don't have convincing data of this sort. There are a handful of studies that have looked at pieces of the puzzle, but these have been largely concerned with whether becoming more religious ameliorates the effects of various life stresses or mental illness, not the broad

question of how religion is related to happiness and well-being. The largest efforts currently under way to redress this gap in the literature originate in the religious community, including especially at divinity schools and religious institutions of higher education. Most of this work is still nascent, but the range of projects in the pipeline suggests that religiously minded researchers are at the forefront of the challenge to provide longitudinal evidence of the kind we need. An excellent summary of projects in progress is maintained by the National Study of Youth and Religion and can be found at www.youthandreligion.org/resources/sites_research.html.

The second lesson is that, even when religion is associated with positive psychological outcomes, it may be because religious involvement establishes the conditions for some more proximal event that is the immediate cause of well-being. This is important, because one might arrive at this proximal cause by any of a number of routes, some of which have no connection with religion. Religion might turn out to be sufficient for well-being but far from necessary.

This second conclusion in particular brings us to a crucial point. The Aristotelian and the religionist may both be interested in the sources of happiness, but for the Aristotelian, the question is larger in scope. Religion may or may not be a contributing factor in creating the good life, but the question is ultimately an empirical one and must encompass the full range of other possible factors that contribute to a life well lived. After all, for the religionist, the most natural interpretation of a positive relationship between religion and the good life is that God blesses those who are properly devout and worshipful. God is the proximal cause in this account, not some mundane material or psychological process. It is tempting to see in such rhetoric, which is particularly common in sermons preached in the new megachurches, a species of neo-Calvinism in which good life outcomes are taken as a sign that one has pleased God.

To fully appreciate the Aristotelian roots of the new science of happiness, one must look more broadly at the full range of factors that contribute to positive life experience. By understanding how the neo-Aristotelian project encompasses religion, we can better understand the age-old choice between worldviews.

AN ARISTOTELIAN SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS

Aristotle would appreciate the impulse to find a set of categories into which to place the various specific factors that might affect one's success or failure at living well. The best effort in this direction was recently outlined by Sonja

“The Aristotelian and the religionist may both be interested in the sources of happiness, but for the Aristotelian, the question is larger in scope.”

Lyubomirsky, Kennon Sheldon, and David Schkade, who argue that the factors influencing well-being fall into three categories. The first category—and, according to most researchers in the area, the category making the largest contribution to one's overall level of happiness—is a set of genetically based biological factors. This doesn't sit well with many people, but the data seem quite convincing on this point. A brief examination of what is probably the most widely cited study in the area is illuminating.

As is often the case for claims about heritability, the best evidence comes from studies of twins, and among the most compelling of the twin studies of happiness is the research by David Lykken and Auke Tellegen at the University of Minnesota. The basic strategy in twin research is to compare the similarity of monozygotic (MZ), or identical, twins with the similarity between dizygotic (DZ), or fraternal, twins. Both kinds of twins share a rearing environment, but only MZ twins share exactly the same genes. DZ twins are no more and no less similar than any other pair of siblings. If MZ twins are more similar to each other than DZ twins on some trait, then there is a genetic contribution to that trait. Careful mathematical calculation allows one to quantify just how large that contribution is.

Lykken and Tellegen assessed the subjective well-being of both kinds of twins when the twins were twenty years old and then repeated the assessment when they were thirty. They then asked the following interesting question: how is twin A's happiness at twenty correlated with twin B's happiness at thirty (and also twin B at twenty with twin A at thirty)? It turns out that the correlation for MZ twins across a ten-year span is not much smaller than the correlation for a given twin with himself ten years later. If you are an identical twin and I know your average level of happiness, I can predict your twin's happiness level decades later knowing nothing more about him than that he shares his genes with you. For DZ twins, however, the correlation was zero. Knowing your happiness level if you are a DZ twin tells me nothing about your sibling.

This pattern strongly suggests that the configuration of one's genes contributes significantly to the overall or average level of happiness one experiences. (Lykken and Tellegen note that the fact that the correlation is zero for DZ twins suggests that the trait is "emergenetic," i.e., that it is not heritable in the usual sense that something like height or eye color is, because the trait depends on a very subtle and complex arrangement of distinct genetic factors that will not be replicated exactly during reproduction because only half of the required genes will be passed on to one's offspring. Like beauty or athletic talent, some of the building blocks will be there, but they will combine in complex ways with the genes of one's sexual partner to produce a new and unique configuration. That is, happy people can have miserable children and vice versa.) The authors estimate that roughly half of the variation between people with average happiness can be laid at the door of such genetic factors. Although some researchers estimate larger or smaller values for the contribution of genetics, the middle of the range in the literature consistently falls at about 50 percent. It appears that each of us has a brain structure designed to respond within a certain happiness range to life's ups and downs. Other factors may

affect how we feel, but each of us tends to return to a genetically stable "set point" of happiness.

This finding is something genuinely new in the history of philosophizing about happiness and the good life. Neither the Buddha, Aristotle, nor King David had a place for this disturbing fact in his theory of the good life. Taken on its own, it invites resignation, if not despair. What is the point of the pursuit of happiness if one is genetically fated to whatever degree of it one is going to have in life? But as Lykken and Tellegen themselves are quick to note, genetics is only half the story. Lyubomirsky and her colleagues suggest that two other categories of causes make their own contributions.

The first of these categories encompasses a vast array of life circumstances, relatively stable (but not fixed or unchangeable) features of one's life known to be related to reported well-being. No researcher has directly contributed more to our understanding of these relationships, or inspired more research by others, than Ed Diener at the University of Illinois. Diener has documented the effect of factors like age, sex, income, education, marital status, and the like for over two decades in virtually every major culture in the world. His work has inspired and set the pattern for dozens of other researchers who have also contributed to the literature on these effects. The results are sometimes complex, but the general trend has two important features.

First, most people are pretty happy most of the time, regardless of variations in their circumstances. Being happy seems to be something human beings are pretty good at. This might well reflect the operation of those genetic factors mentioned above if there has been some evolutionary pressure in favor of being more rather than less happy, a point to which I will return shortly. It might also be that people do a good job of getting used to whatever circumstances they find themselves in; human beings are nothing if not adaptable. And it might well be that the general state of humanity is actually quite a lot better than one might expect from watching television news or reading the dire warnings of professional gloomsters in academia. Indeed, all of these are likely contributors to the generally happy state of people around the world.

What is perhaps most surprising is how small the effect of circumstance is on variation in happiness. For example, income matters, but it really makes a large difference only at the bottom end of the range. Above a surprisingly low threshold, having more wealth doesn't make one happier—a finding, by the way, that is frequently touted in religious publications on the subject of happiness. Age matters, but not in the direction one might expect: older people tend to be happier than younger people, a trend that continues right up to the end of life. Being healthier is associated with being happier, and living in free societies with liberal political systems and greater personal and economic freedom helps make people happier as well. The jokes of sitcoms and comedians notwithstanding, married people are happier than unmarried people, and whether you're male or female matters little or not at all. Typically, involvement in religious communities is also included in this category, and as we have seen, there is a small but positive effect of that circumstance as well. All together, looking across a wide variety of studies, the combined effect of life circumstances accounts for something on



the order of 11 or 12 percent of the variability in how happy people are.

So what explains the rest of the variation, well over a third of the total, after we have accounted for genetics and life circumstances? Here, we come to a finding in which Aristotle would take very great pleasure. All else being equal, the happiest people with the greatest sense of satisfaction in their lives are people who consistently and persistently pursue self-chosen goals and make progress toward their attainment. The number of studies elaborating and extending this general conclusion continues to increase, and there are subtleties and nuances here, but the general conclusion seems unavoidable. It helps if one chooses goals that are a good fit for one's talents and inclinations. Equally important is to vary the goal, which not only gives practice at initiating and sustaining activity but also helps to avoid the tendency to become bored with, and thus no longer take pleasure in, things that are done in a routine fashion. But changing goals must not be at the expense of making progress on those that are chosen. A great deal of work now suggests that the ongoing feeling of progress toward a goal provides at least as much of the sense of accomplishment, pleasure, and satisfaction that comes from an activity as does the attainment of the goal itself.

Thus, as Aristotle tried to teach us, pursuing rationally chosen goals intelligently and successfully creates a powerful sense of the good life. The new science of happiness also teaches us that acting volitionally and effectively is likely to be most effective when it acknowledges the other sources of variation in our happiness. It helps to know one's own temperamental tendencies and one's abilities and inclinations well enough to choose activities wisely. And choosing goals that improve one's circumstances over time can also make a difference, especially at the margins. There are multiple keys to the life well lived, but these are the ones that give us the greatest scope for change.

Yet, there is still something important missing from this account. From an Aristotelian point of view, the focus on subjective well-being, whether it is measured as happiness, satisfaction with life, or what have you, fails to get to the heart of things. For Aristotle, achieving *eudaimonia* is not equivalent to feeling happy or satisfied. It is not primarily a subjective state at all. Instead, *eudaimonia* refers to the objective condition of one's life and can be evaluated by any external observer, including oneself. A deranged serial killer might feel quite satisfied with what he or she has accomplished, but Aristotle would object that this in no way means that the killer has lived a good life.

Here, we come to a difficult set of issues with which the sciences of mind have yet to grapple successfully. The Aristotelian notion of the good life requires the making of value judgments—and objective ones at that, according to Aristotle—and the cognitive sciences have historically insisted on a fact-versus-value distinction that leaves the latter to normative philosophers, permitting the researcher to focus only on his data and theory. There is room for much heavy intellectual lifting here, and I don't presume to have a simple solution to the dilemma, but a recent body of research should

at the very least provoke further conversation on the matter. This research is nicely summarized by Sonja Lyubomirsky and her colleagues, Laura King and Ed Diener, in a recent review. It describes the many ways in which being happy actually seems to be the cause of leading a good life, rather than the other way around. A sense of well-being seems to be one of the causal contributors to success in work, marriage, and building and maintaining friendships. Happy people are healthier and, all else being equal, make more money than unhappy people. Taken together with the research on sources of well-being reviewed earlier, this suggests that the internal or subjective state of well-being operates in a dynamic, feed-forward relationship with the external, objective indicators of the good life. Choosing and pursuing rational goals alters one's sense of well-being, which apparently makes one more attractive to mates, friends, and employers, all of which can shift one's external circumstances in the direction of improved well-being. The good life is thus achieved objectively and marked subjectively by the feelings of happiness and satisfaction, which make it easier to sustain the objectively good life. To them who have, more shall be granted.

GOD, ARISTOTLE, AND THE NEW SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS

The new science of happiness has taught us some things that religion doesn't know and Aristotle didn't know. It has also reaffirmed and put on solid empirical footing a number of long-standing truisms about what it means to live a good and satisfying life. It should not surprise us that much of what we have learned is part of the wisdom of the ages. As Jonathan Haidt has documented quite thoroughly, many of the things that we know about human psychology from modern research are anticipated in ancient pearls of wisdom available in both textual form and in grandma's folk psychology. Our ancestors may not have had access to the scientific method or to modern data-collection and analysis procedures, but the best among them were just as good as we are at finding patterns, seeing relationships between things, and passing those discoveries along to the rest of us. A process of cognitive and cultural selection weeds out bad ideas and promotes better ones, leaving us with what we think of as ancient wisdom. But the advantages of modern science over ancient truisms are significant; in any conflict between the two, it would be wise to take serious notice of what the science tells us.

Ancient wisdom tells us of the existence of a supernatural world, the only place where true happiness is to be found. One lives according to the laws of the supernatural realm in order to earn escape from the natural world and the suffering it entails. Ironically, modern religionists claim that living according to this worldview will make one happier in this life as well. The literature does show that at least some religious systems can function as an organizing system that helps to establish goals and purposes for one's life, the very things that give life meaning and the pursuit of

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which is associated with well-being, success, and happiness. This is true, provided, of course, that the goals encouraged are life affirming. As Sam Harris has recently argued quite convincingly, religions differ in the degree to which they encourage negation or abandonment of this life in favor of the putative next world.

It would appear, then, that whether or not one is religious is largely orthogonal to whether or not one lives the good life, whether measured subjectively or objectively. Religious involvement is likely not the proximal cause of either well-being or success. It is not necessary in order to achieve the good life, nor is it sufficient. Indeed, adoption of a religious perspective that leads to renunciation of the activities of this world in favor of the next will likely have negative effects on well-being, a conclusion supported by studies of people prone to seeking mystical experiences. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that although belief in God is neither necessary nor sufficient for achieving the good life, it is also not necessarily an impediment. Indeed, one of the things that the new science of happiness teaches us is that the right religion under the right circumstances (conditions of political and economic liberty with the opportunity and ability to exercise personal choices) may be a very slight plus for some people if it contributes to the kinds of choices known to promote well-being and success. In some implicit way, many in the religious community seem to understand this, which is why they find themselves allied with the Aristotelians in their very earthly concerns with the new science of happiness. But make no mistake: in this case, the playing field belongs to the neo-Aristotelians. **II**

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FI Interview

A Talk with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi— the Father of ‘Flow’

Nathan Bupp



Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi garnered wide attention with his bestselling 1990 book, Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience, in which he argued that the most rewarding happiness lies in the skillful performance of meaningful work that fully occupies one's attention. He has emerged as one of the leading figures in the growing positive-psychology movement. FREE INQUIRY's Associate Editor Nathan Bupp questioned Csikszentmihalyi about positive psychology and his own insights.

FREE INQUIRY: In your opinion, what are some of the most valuable insights to emerge out of the “science-of-happiness” field?

MIHALY CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: Personally, I have been most impressed by the effects of the “gratitude intervention” that Martin Seligman has devised, which apparently has a lasting effect in raising people’s happiness. Basically, volunteers are assigned randomly to various “interventions,” and their happiness is assessed before and after. This method is almost identical to the double-blind, random-assignment experiments used by pharmaceutical companies to assess whether a new drug is effective. In the gratitude intervention, people are asked to think about a person who was kind or helpful to them but has never been thanked for it. Then the volunteer is supposed to write a one-page letter of thanks, make an appointment with the target person, and read the letter in his or her presence. The volunteers who are randomly assigned to do this task show significant increases in happiness half a year after completing it. Other interventions based on positive psychology experiments also show impressive results, but this appears to be the most effective.

FI: How can we educate our emotions? What is your view on “emotional intelligence?” Is it a valuable construct?

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: I am not sure that educating the emotions alone should be a main goal. From Castiglione’s courtier to Dale Carnegie, there have been many good prescriptions for how to achieve emotional education, but it seems to me one needs to ask a more fundamental question: how do we develop character?

FI: Can there be a genuine science of happiness that is entirely distinct from pharmaceutical intervention?

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: I certainly hope so. Drugs can do neat things, but I doubt any state of consciousness worthy of the label “happiness” can be induced by them—except in temporary bursts that do not have long-lasting effects. Think Soma or opium. Drugs can modify behavior and get us to strive for goals, but they cannot indicate what behaviors and goals are more likely to lead to happiness. Whether the non-pharmaceutical study of behaviors and goals that may lead to happiness will ever become a science is, of course, still uncertain, but it’s worth pursuing, isn’t it?

FI: What—and who—were some of the philosophical precursors to your concept of “flow?”

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: I was influenced by some graduate courses on Husserl and Heidegger that made me take seriously the phenomenological approach, which I have tried to make more systematic in my own research. Also, Abraham Maslow’s concept of “peak experience” was influential, and it resonated with my experience in playing chess and in rock climbing. After

I started writing about flow, I came across a huge amount of material from Hindu and Chinese sources that indicated that similar ideas have a long history in other cultures as well.

FI: In your book, *The Evolving Self*, you talk about the need to see through the “Veils of Maya,” those mental blinders that the self, culture, and our genes impose on us. Secular humanists have talked a lot about the need for the cultivation of critical thinking in the public at large. Is there an inherent need in humans to harbor a certain amount of “positive illusions?” What does the science of happiness have to say about this?

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: Yes, the importance of “positive illusions” as an anchor for morale has been recognized for a long time, by observers ranging from Karl Marx to Vilfredo Pareto to Sigmund Freud. Of course, what is real and what is illusory is not always clear. Current research shows that people who take a positive view of things (and thus might be seen to suffer from illusions) have a better chance of changing their external circumstances, which is to say, their reality.

FI: Are the conclusions flowing from the “science-of-happiness” research humanistic?

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: I do think so. I know that some colleagues who identify themselves as “humanistic psychologists” would say no, as an understandable reaction to the reductionistic, simple-minded application of the scientific method to psychology, especially by workers in the generation from 1950 to 1980. But in my opinion, banning science from human affairs is like throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

FI: What role or roles can classical conceptions of the good life—such as those of Epicurus, Aristotle, and Spinoza—play in a modern, scientifically advanced world?

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: I am firmly on the side of science, but not to the extent of assuming that because we live in a modern (or post-modern) world we are actually in every respect wiser, or even more thoughtful, than people who lived a few millennia ago. I assume that when we can’t learn anything new from Aristotle et al., we will stop reading them. At this point, that does not seem likely.

FI: Has science killed the “soul”—metaphorically speaking?

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: Many people who speak of the “soul” do so in a somewhat narcissistic, romantic way—they mean by it something unique to them, mysterious, perhaps God-given. I like to think of it as something we create by investing our psychic energy in goals that benefit entities outside ourselves. The Romans’ term for this was *magnanimus*, the root of our *magnanimous*, from the Latin *magna* (great) and *anima* (soul); the Hindus strung the same concepts together in their title *mahatma*, which is given to people like Gandhi. In this sense, science is not inherently inimical to the soul—on the contrary.

FI: In a naturalistic world—devoid of religion—can a creative blend of the humanities and the sciences lead to an ultimately more fulfilling and absorbing life?

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: It had better be possible, or things will not go too well for our species. Such a “blend” will require enormous creativity—but I do think that, as time goes on, its inevitability will become increasingly obvious.

FI: We have often heard about philosophical wisdom. Can there be a genuine science of wisdom, a scientific wisdom?

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: German psychologist Paul Baltes and the American psychologist Robert Sternberg have started systematic studies of happiness—the approach is still in its infancy, but again, I’d say it’s worth pursuing.

FI: Americans seem to be caught up in a primarily materialis-

tic conception of happiness—the “hedonic treadmill,” as it is sometimes called. Is this written in our genes?

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: I think there is a strong genetic component in this need for possessions. After all, our ancestors living in conditions of scarcity must have been selected for the ability to secure material resources—tools, food, domestic animals, and the like. It’s hard to escape from the results of hundreds of generations of natural selection. The question is whether now that we are becoming aware of the fact that we are the main selective force on the planet, will we be able to apply brakes to this greed for ever more stuff?

FI: Is the situation similar in Europe?

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: I think Europe has been to some extent sobered up by how close the West came to annihilation during World War II, and so there is some hope for a new global contract to emerge from there. But of course, greed has been at home in Europe for a long time—just as it has been in China and everywhere else.

FI: In *The Evolving Self*, you say early on that “at this point in history it should be possible for an individual to build a self that is a conscious, personal creation—not just an outcome of biological drives.” What tools do we have at our disposal to help make this so?

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: We have more freedom, more free time, more knowledge, and fewer cultural pressures than at virtually any other time in the past—at least we have the potential for these. While most of these precious resources are ignored or being wasted, the potential for taking control of one’s consciousness seems much greater than it has ever been. Perhaps we need a real scare to make us take our task seriously—global warming? Avian flu? George W. Bush?

FI: Is frustration and a vague sense of discontent the price we pay for being human? In other words, are humans victims of their own biological design?

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: I do think that the price we pay for our large brain, which frees us from being completely programmed by genetic instructions, is that, too often, we act in ways that have not passed the muster of natural selection. Instead of adding value to our lives, these acts can detract from it. Of course, the independence of our brains from past instructions has a potentially enormous upside too—the freedom to create completely new ways of being. A dangerous tool, this big brain, but it can be lots of fun.

FI: You have said that you “have a naïve trust in the universe—that at some level it all makes sense, and we can get glimpses of that sense if we try.” Can you explain further?

CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: Well, I suppose it’s a variation on Pascal’s wager—the idea that since we don’t know whether there is some meaning in existence or not, we are better off believing in it than not believing. After all, realizing that, despite its size, my brain allows me only a pitifully minuscule glimpse of reality makes me humble about what I don’t know. Perhaps there is a rhyme to the music of the spheres after all. And sometimes, one definitely gets that impression—perhaps only a small intimation, but enough to keep hope alive.

FI: Philosophers have often drawn distinctions between a life of contemplation and the life of action. From the standpoint of the science of happiness, can one be seen to be more fulfilling than the other, or is it the better part of wisdom to attempt to forge a synthesis of both?

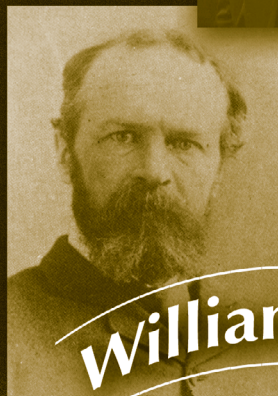
CSIKSZENTMIHALYI: I was very impressed by Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition* and her analysis of the *vita contemplativa* versus the *vita activa*—so much so that I can say nothing on the topic that is original. In my work, I have suggested that the best solution is a synthesis—but saying that is the easy way out, isn’t it? ■



Can Psychology Be Positive about Religion?

John Shook

Martin Seligman



William James

Over one hundred years ago, the Harvard philosopher and psychologist, William James, argued in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* that religious beliefs and emotions can have positive value for people's lives. James's pragmatism demanded that a scientific psychology take people's religious beliefs seriously, not because science could directly judge their truth or falsity, but because such beliefs have practical consequences for the quality and meaning of life. James emphasized that psychology could study people's religious views scientifically only if it refrained from prejudging them. What matters is not whether a religious belief is factual or actually inspired by divine causes but whether a person's life is affected, positively or negatively, by holding that religious belief. James suggested that a person's religious belief could be pragmatically reasonable if holding that belief was important for that person's successful pursuit of a meaningful and happy life.

James viewed himself as a humanist, seeking wisdom needed for improving human happiness in this mortal life. He was often intrigued by notions of an afterlife. However, James demanded and sought empirical evidence and always required that religious notions be tested for their capacity to enhance people's welfare in the present. If one's definition of a humanist requires one to live entirely without any religious or spiritual concerns, James is excluded. Yet, he would in turn ask whether every possible religious hypothesis had been examined for practical value.

The better empiricist, like James, is one who is willing to confront all human experience and test all hypotheses pragmatically. One of today's great pragmatists is Paul Kurtz, who coined the term *eupraxsophy* to denote the search for a more coherent and meaningful worldview based on scientific methods. This humanistic search, according to Kurtz, "wishes to extend the methods of objective inquiry to all areas of life, including religious, philosophical, ethical, and political concerns that are often left unexamined." Humanism should not obstruct empirical research into any area of human experience.

In several ways, today's field of positive psychology has revived the spirit of James's pragmatic humanism and offers scientific assistance to Kurtz's eupraxsophy. While other "humanistic psychologies" were invented during the decades since James's time, positive psychology's recent growth has rested on much greater empirical research into happiness. Some of that research is summarized in Martin Seligman's book, *Authentic Happiness*, which discusses aspects of religious faith. Seligman, a professor of psychology and the director of the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, is intrigued, like James, by the impact of religious belief on personal happiness. Only a relatively small amount of research has been done in this area by positive psychology, but the preliminary conclusions are intriguing.

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Seligman is impressed by the way that such character strengths as “appreciation of beauty and excellence,” “gratitude,” “optimism,” “attachment to something greater,” “capacity for mercy,” “playfulness,” and “spiritedness” typically appear to enhance the chances of personal fulfillment. Seligman groups these character strengths under the label “transcendence,” because these strengths “reach outside and beyond you to connect you to something larger and more permanent: to other people, to the future, to evolution, to the divine, or to the universe.” *Transcendence*, as Seligman uses the term, must not be misunderstood as religion by another name. For example, some secular humanists identify belief in “the transcendent” (the supernatural, for example) with religion, so that any religious belief must involve the supernatural. In any case, Seligman deliberately uses the broader term *transcendence* instead, avoiding partisan debates over how to define *religion*, and includes character strengths that are quite independent from anything transcendent.

Secular humanists should ask whether Seligman’s notion of transcendence is helpful or harmful to a scientific and naturalistic worldview. Recently, I interviewed James Pawelski, Director of Education and Senior Scholar at Penn’s Positive Psychology Center, to ask about his views of positive psychology’s aims and principles. In reply to the question, “Can positive psychology be viewed as a contribution to the tradition of humanism?” Pawelski replied, “Certainly, in the broad sense in which any science is a humanistic endeavor. Going beyond the science itself, many positive psychologists would be in sympathy with general humanistic claims. Seligman argues, for example, that free will is a key component of positive psychology. As private individuals, positive psychologists differ in their commitments; as with any similar group of scientists, some are naturalists and some are supernaturalists. But, as positive psychologists, they are scientists, committed to empirical investigation in accordance with the scientific method.” Pawelski went on to add, “Positive psychology is no more and no less consistent with a naturalistic worldview than is any other field in the social sciences.”

From a perusal of the primary texts produced by Seligman, a devotion to the methodology of science is indeed evident, complete with James’s demand for initial scientific neutrality towards subjects. Aligned with James’s empiricism, positive psychology—at least in the hands of Seligman and his followers—refuses to first assume either the validity or falsity of religious claims; it is sufficient to investigate how people rely on their religious beliefs.

Although positive psychology may remain faithful to empirical neutrality at the outset of its investigations, we may still wonder about potential conclusions of future research into religious beliefs and their connections with happiness. Is it possible that some conclusions of positive psychology could be interpreted as scientific evidence of the value of supernatural religion? To this question, Pawelski replies, “I’m sure someone somewhere is going to try to make that further claim. To make such a claim now, however, is to go beyond what is scientifically known. Studies seem to indicate that religious persons are happier than nonreligious persons. But we don’t yet know in which direction the causal connection runs. Does religion make people happier? Does happiness make people religious? Or does some third thing make people both religious and happy? Even if it turns out that it’s religion that makes people happier, we still wouldn’t know

what the causal agent in religion is. Is it participation in a close community? Is it the avoidance of vices and risky behavior? Is it the release of stress and anxiety? Is it participation in religious ritual? Is it divine grace? This last option is certainly a possibility, but I can’t imagine how positive psychology or any other science could ever prove (or disprove) such a thing.”

It is reassuring to humanists and naturalists to hear Pawelski’s confidence that positive psychology should not prove to be a scientific field that attempts to deliver judgments about the reality of the supernatural. Pawelski concluded the interview by addressing this concern. He added, “Does happiness have a supernatural source? I know of no positive psychologist who would disagree with me when I say that this question lies outside of the purview of positive psychology.”

Nevertheless, the spirit of James hovers over these new scientific developments. James required of reasonable beliefs that they positively contribute to a person’s ability to lead a meaningful and satisfactory life. If *reasonable* means only “practical” in this Jamesian sense, then it is possible that positive psychology’s investigations into transcendence will show how some religious beliefs are reasonable independent of their being true or false (while other religious beliefs may prove by the same standard to be unreasonable). And probably, we will not have to wait long for a few enthusiasts to try to combine empirical results from positive psychology with James’s pragmatic standard of reasonableness to mount an attack on scientific naturalism. Do supernatural beliefs in an afterlife or in transcendent divinities actually enhance happiness? If so, then such beliefs cannot be unreasonable. This “pragmatism” might reunite religion and science, as James hoped.

We may prepare for this unfortunate eventuality by a reminder, as Kurtz’s writings always supply, of the highest standards of scientific inquiry. No hypothesis may be accepted as reasonable until it has been repeatedly used to make risky predictions about future events, and, until those predictions are confirmed, the hypothesis must be viewed with skepticism. James’s version of pragmatism first seeks out conviction, not skepticism, which unfortunately reverses the genuine scientific attitude. A naturalistic humanism should require that any proposal to enhance the character strengths of transcendence must be compatible with *all* of science’s knowledge and not merely with personal satisfaction. As secular humanism elaborates and deepens its worldview and way of life, positive psychology can become a powerful ally by scientifically studying those character strengths of transcendence (*not* the transcendent) capable of promoting the happy life. Positive psychology, by remaining faithful to the scientific ideal, will contribute to eupraxis. In the meantime, not even the pursuit of happiness should be permitted to arouse the transcendental temptation toward supernaturalism. ■■

Further Reading

- Robert Emmons, “Spirituality: Recent Progress,” in a *Life Worth Living: Contributions to Positive Psychology*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Isabella Csikszentmihalyi, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 62–81.
- William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1902).
- Paul Kurtz, *Embracing the Power of Humanism* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).
- Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness* (New York: Free Press, 2002).



How Can Philosophy Address the Problem of Happiness?

James Gouinlock



Back in the golden age of Greece, love of wisdom was directed above all to the questions of the nature of the best life and the means of attaining it. This would be the life of *eudaimonia*—happiness. The only means of taking up these all-important questions were philosophy and the literary arts. Today, however, philosophers seem to have little to contribute to this vital topic, which resides in the province of literature and is pursued by psychologists of various description, religious writers, and still others.

The present historical condition notwithstanding, there seems to be no good reason that philosophers cannot contribute substantially to our impassioned queries about the good life and a happiness worth having. As evidence of this, consider the fact that literate people continue to ponder the works of ancients and moderns—Plato and Aristotle through Nietzsche and beyond—with great profit. Let us turn, then, to two giants of the twentieth century: George Santayana and John Dewey. Each thought of himself as primarily a moral philosopher, and each made mighty contributions to the human quest for a happy and meaningful life. Furthermore, the philosophy of each was systematically naturalistic. A review of each thinker's key ideas will display the continuing pertinence of philosophic thought to the search for a deep and abiding happiness.

Naturalistic philosophy is typically distinguished from the supernaturalistic variety, but the difference between the two is by no means exhausted in the question of whether one is some manner of theist or not. Santayana and Dewey, for example, were both atheists, but they regarded the primary question of moral philosophy to be the discernment and analysis of the nature of nature and the determination of how human life is situated in regard to its most salient eventualities. Nature, after all, has been understood in a great variety of ways, and there has been a corresponding variety of ways in which the human venture has been conceived. (Indeed, if there are gods, we must learn of their respective natures and potencies and their varied dispositions towards us. Any serious philosopher must wish to determine the nature of the comprehending whole and its noteworthy features, whatever they turn out to be.)

Both Santayana and Dewey repeatedly pointed out that philosophers and many others have been eager to populate the universe with all manner of beings—such as gods of all description, Platonic forms, final causes, universal reason, and so on—for which there is no evidential warrant. They have likewise hastened to find ways to banish any sort of existence they found unbecoming—such as evil or inherent

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irrationality—regardless of how conspicuous and fateful such traits are in human experience. A full and honest philosophy, in contrast, must make an assessment both searching and candid of the sprawling and dramatic powers of nature and determine what they might hold for human aspiration and destiny. Thus, we might discern the real limitations and possibilities of human life, formulate and pursue honest affirmations, achieve life-sustaining and perhaps life-celebrating values, and even fashion a happiness suitable to a “free and disillusioned spirit”—in Santayana’s phrase.

The principal work in which George Santayana addresses these ambitions is his great *The Life of Reason*, in five volumes (1905–1906). He acknowledged that his inspiration was the thought of Plato and Aristotle. The parallel work by John Dewey is the equally magisterial *Experience and Nature* (1925). For each thinker, the first target is the philosophy of Descartes and its legacy, which endured vigorously into the twentieth century. The problem with Descartes is not primarily his dualism of mind and body; that is one of his derivative positions. More decisive is his doctrine that experience is wholly subjective: we do not and cannot directly experience worldly events, including other persons. By means of a historically persistent but nonetheless fallacious argument, Descartes assumes that the “really real” is and must be eternally changeless in its being. True to this analysis, nature is but matter in motion, and nothing else; nature has no potentialities. The qualities revealed to experience may not be predicated of it, for these qualities undergo change and, hence, cannot be assigned to natures that do not change. With one sweep, all those events in our experience that we regard as lovely or revolting, beautiful or hideous, noble or base, exciting or tedious—they are one and all denizens of the subjective mind and have no implication for the nature of nature. No qualitative change or trait can be true of the putative outer world, nor can any cherished value or shining ideal have any habitation there. In that all experience is subjective, we have no access to nature except by some tortured logic of *a priori* reasoning. (God guarantees that all of our clear and distinct ideas are true; and such ideas are radically independent of experience.) On such assumptions, the moral life is governed by, if anything, absolute values somehow resident in the being of changeless perfection.

The legacy of subjectivism dominated modern philosophy in all of its prominent forms. What Santayana and Dewey rejected above all in that legacy were the conception of nature as void of all the properties vital to human experience and the assertion that the very scene of our strivings is unknowable. Any relevant and helpful characterization of our natural abode, on the other hand, is predicated on the argument that experience is not an

impassable barrier between an individual and the rest of the world but instead one’s very access to it. It must likewise be argued that the multifarious properties and changes that we experience in things are true of those things. For both thinkers, the key to such an argument is that experience is contextual: it occurs and persists only under certain conditions in nature, and in other conditions it does not. In one ascertainable context, fire is truly hot; in another, it is not. Contextual analyses displace the crippling dogma that the really real is eternally changeless. The riot of qualities, changes, and variations with which we thrive or fail is restored to the real world, and our experience is no longer insulted by philosophy. A philosopher need no longer be confined to thinking of nature as matter *per se* but may enter at last into the vastly more significant and productive inquiry into nature’s most eventful *outcomes*—for human good and evil.

The Life of Reason is inspired throughout by what Santayana calls the Aristotelian principle: rather than being fixed substances, all things ideal are outcomes of natural processes. One of Santayana’s memorable expressions of this idea is found in his comment:

“In a world evermore given to
superficialities, irrationalities, and
amusements, the good of both the
individual and society requires
informed, disciplined, and humane
reflection on the overall contours
that life might take.”

“Love is a brilliant illustration of a principle everywhere discoverable: namely, that human reason lives by turning the friction of material forces into the light of ideal goods.” In the context of Cartesianism, this is a revolutionary idea, and a liberating one: it is a principle of resource in the conduct of life. Instead of subordinating ourselves to supposed unchanging absolutes, we identify distinctive possibilities of ideal fulfillment and devote ourselves to their deliberate making.

Though rarely recognized and attained, these ideals are not inherently esoteric. They are completions of our inherent yearnings to wrest beautiful and noble outcomes from within the flux of nature. Friendship, for example, is a condition with which most people are familiar, but it commonly occurs and is commonly understood in coarse and thoughtless ways, its varieties and ideal promises obscure and unredeemed, its continuities with other climactic goods unnoticed. Santayana, however, writes of friendship with astonishing sensitivity and insight, and he speaks eloquently of how it becomes organic to the entire life of reason. The pages of these volumes are likewise woven of brilliant and profound discernments of a range of ideal possibilities that lie fallow in the forms of social life, in religion, the arts, science, and the moral life. Santayana’s genius quickens the *eros* within the human breast and inspires ideal life.

The love of an ideal good originates with primal impulses of human nature that, with experience and dedication, may be transfigured in the ferment of nature. The ideal also requires discipline and renunciation, for no great fulfillment is possible for one who is a mere hedonist, a dabbler and dilettante. The good would be a fulfillment of one’s inmost love thus developed



and concerted, and the subordinate goods of one's being would be ordered in reference to the supreme good. Love of the ideal provides the motivating force in the ordering process. The psyche might then become an integrated whole and integrated as well with "all that the soul depends on."

This is at a great remove from any ideal that could be conceived in the terms of modern philosophy. It is likewise removed, as Santayana repeatedly observed, from any good that could be conceived, much less achieved, within a culture obsessed with the instrumentalities of material success. Santayana's philosophy is directed to the reflective, educated, and yearning soul, to the individual who seeks an intellectually responsible conception of the status of a human being within the nature of things and who loves the ideal possibilities of nature. Such love has often found expression in religion, and Santayana does not shrink from appropriating religious values in characterizing the naturalistic life of reason. Piety, for example, in his articulation, is "reverent attachment to the sources of our being," starting with parents, family, teachers, social institutions, traditions, culture, and customary ways of life. One distinguishes above all those conditions that have nurtured and sustained one's love of the ideal, and these might lie far afield. For Santayana himself, the entire Western tradition of religion, literature, art, science, and philosophy was an object of the utmost piety—though it must always be understood with critical acumen.

While piety looks to origins, spirituality looks to ideal outcomes. On Santayana's view, spiritual life is the single-minded devotion to ideal ends and participation in them—even to the active formation of ideal ends. Thus, one lives in the ideal. This rendering of life in the spirit yields the further notion of ideal immortality, where *ideal* means deliberately constructed from the materials of natural life. In our union with the ideal, there is a manner of union with others who have also abided there. We share a manner of Platonic participation in an immortal realm, where *immortal* means imperishably good in idea—in meaning. In our cognizance of the ideal and in our love for it, we share in ideal immortality.

In briefest outline, this is the life of reason. It is more than a philosophy of self-fulfillment. It answers to the need for self-knowledge in its classical conception: the self understood within the full frame of existence. The self gives a greater meaning to nature; nature is, among other things, the fecund source of ideality and meaning in the furthest reaches of biological life. At the same time, life in the ideal gives meaning to nature; nature is not reducible to matter in motion. Its multiple and varying processes are of the nature to produce ideal goods (as well as much else). As such, it is an object of piety. At the same time, the self that is fulfilled is not the original swarm of biological drives. The life of reason fulfills much more than mere appetite. It fulfills the self in its ideal potentialities. Santayana's philosophy answers to the longings of *eros*, the love of the noble and beautiful. And it is all said and done on a naturalistic basis.

This is also a happy life, which Santayana sharply distinguishes from a mere aggregate of pleasures. Dependent upon a certain formation of the self, it is more satisfying than the random, episodic, and carnal pleasures of the hedonist; and it is a felt satisfaction of the best possibilities of the self. Thus, it is a worthy and enduring happiness.

John Dewey was more detailed and comprehensive in his philosophy of nature than anything to be found in *The Life of Reason*. Passing by the (typically trenchant and innovative) technicalities of his analyses, one is confronted above all in *Experience and Nature* and in much else in his corpus by the idea of nature as the scene of teeming qualitative *change*, by turns gentle or catastrophic, congenial or threatening, amiable or repulsive. Nature aims at no inclusive *telos*, or end; it harbors no fixed substances nor transcendent or immanent absolutes. Its marvels and horrors are outcomes of varying processes of change. Dewey is occupied not with nature in its original materiality but in its remarkable outcomes—those decisive for the conduct of life and the pursuit of happiness.

With desire and intelligence, change can be ordered for human advantage. As participants in processes of change, we may deliberately reconstruct them in order to unify our talents and energies with the ongoing processes of the environment; in this very transformation, we engage and fulfill our natural powers. In turn, these powers are refined and strengthened in the process. There is no shortage of goods in human experience, Dewey remarks, but they are fragmented, muted, incoherent with each other, and evanescent. Our problem is not to flee all of this in search of an all-saving good but to reorder our experience to integrate and secure the finite activities ingredient of our well-being. We *construct* our goods; and when new problems arise, we attempt a unification with the more or less novel situation, producing a more or less novel consummation. The very process of creating these fulfilling experiences is a great good. Hence Dewey speaks of the good of activity, which he also refers to as growth, and he declares, "Growth itself is the only moral end."

The notion of a final, static, and absolute good is banished. Good riddance! cries Dewey. Mankind has groaned under the imposition of allegedly changeless ends in a world where constructive novelty and innovation might occur in the company of intelligence. Human beings could flourish in an attractive variety of ways, enjoying fulfilling activity in ways hitherto obscured or forbidden by the doctrine of fixed ends. Dewey is justly famous for having overturned the founding doctrine of the Western tradition in philosophy: that being is changeless. His fundamental criticism of the Western tradition is that it is impotent to deal effectively with processes of change.

Dewey is detailed in his analyses of the means of transforming situations from problematic to consummatory. It is a sweeping and powerful replacement of the classic tradition with a philosophy of creative intelligence. It is an epochal achievement. An especially noteworthy feature of his theory is the recognition that the transformation of situations is typically a social process. It is appropriate, then, in his view, that the process be openly communicative, collaborative, and cooperative—rather than ruled by authority. Morally problematic situations, above all, would best be confronted in this way. He calls this procedure "social intelligence"; he also calls it democracy as a way of life. It is a way of life barely sampled hitherto, and his lifelong concerns with education were in large part motivated by the hope that the very processes of education would inculcate the habits

of thought and conduct that could make social intelligence a reality.

Not surprisingly, Dewey does not regard the socialized qualities of conduct to be an imposition on its participants. Deliberate social converse makes conduct more effective, and it contributes as well to the fullest development of human nature. Awestruck by the very fact that human beings are *capable* of rational and intimate communication, he exclaims, “Shared experience is the greatest of human goods.”

Dewey’s characterization of the active life is obviously not value-neutral. His devastating critiques of the classic tradition stand or fall on their own merits, to be sure, but to regard the tradition as an incubus and to heap praises upon the life of social intelligence proclaims love of a life of creative action. When he speaks of the good of activity, he means it. Not only was he most enlightened about the ways in which activity can be invested with value; he was also, in life, the quintessential activist. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, he is emphatic in asserting that obsession with the future compromises the present good of activity. “The good is now or never,” he says. This is a life of fulfilling the potentialities of ongoing experience, not one of awaiting a divine, far-off event. Especially when we recall that activity at its best is a shared experience, we witness here the life of happiness in Dewey’s conviction and experience.

Dewey never once evinced nostalgia for the absolute, was never wistful for a *a priori* reason, and never yearned for the eternal and unchanging. Still, it was deeply important to him to develop a comprehensive view of the nature of things. This would satisfy a personal need, and it would also, he trusted, help to rid the world of the crisis in modern philosophy. To cherish such a grand aim might appear a contradiction: isn’t his very life directed to a far-off good? It is fair to say that there *is* something of a contradiction here. On Dewey’s behalf, we may point out that the process of developing his philosophy consisted of a longtime involvement with an almost limitless series of problematic situations, each of which demanded creative thought and some reordering of his ideas; and, certainly, he delighted in the activity of developing his thought. Yet he had an overarching aim that gave unity and direction to many of his talents and enthusiasms. In his works, Dewey does speak (usually in passing) of ideal goods, with little if any elaboration, but he never shows much in the way of real enthusiasm for them. Perhaps he was so apprehensive about the persisting menace of the classic tradition that he was a bit uncomfortable engaging in any talk of ideal ends; and perhaps he found his ongoing activities so engrossing that he did not fully appreciate that they were made into a meaningful whole by an inclusive and distant goal. Here, we may fittingly recall that Santayana’s notion of ideal ends is built upon the Aristotelian principle, not upon transcendent Platonic forms. We can perfectly well embrace different sorts of ends at the same time: the ends-in-view of current activity and the ideal goods that would impart meaning to an entire lifetime (just as Dewey did, without quite recognizing it). In his many attentions to the quickening of *eros* and its service to what is noble and beautiful, Santayana is superior to Dewey; but Dewey’s philosophy need not have neglected this dimension of the moral life.

The previous discussions illustrate that philosophic thought can contribute to one’s understanding of one’s

own life as constituent of the greater whole (just as it can obscure it), and it can orient the aims and activities of a life to the real possibilities, instrumentalities, and limitations of the natural world. I submit that philosophies of the sort I have been discussing are not mere luxuries and should not be regarded as peripheral to the main business of life. In a world evermore given to superficialities, irrationalities, and amusements, the good of both the individual and society requires informed, disciplined, and humane reflection on the overall contours that life might take. It also requires grounding in profound objects of piety, in the sense that Santayana gave us. It likewise requires an appreciation for the ideal goods that might summon one’s best self, offering direction to otherwise aimless and disordered souls. A philosophy could as well attempt to offer the fullest meanings available to mortal existence, insisting on unforgiving attention to the pertinent characteristics of the encompassing whole.

It is difficult to speak incisively on the present subject of happiness. One might urge that this is inevitable, seeing that “happiness” means different things to different people. It is true that “happiness” is difficult to circumscribe, and one must happily admit that there are genuinely different forms of it, as in the cases before us: Santayana and Dewey. Still, it is important not to concede too much to those who say that happiness is infinitely variable. Plato and Aristotle were only mistaken in part in their assertion that there is but one form of the good life, while there are innumerable many ways of going wrong. There truly *are* innumerable ways of going wrong, but there is more than one way of getting it right. Just the same, I would strongly subscribe to the Greek emphasis and urge that there are very *few* ways of getting it right. (If there were infinitely many ways, indeed, neither philosophy nor any other discipline could have anything helpful to say about the matter. That would be a disastrous conclusion.)

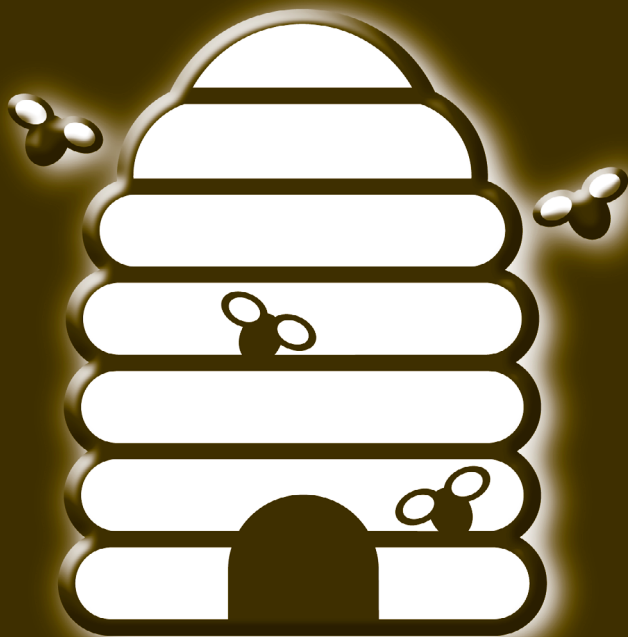
In an important sense, nevertheless, it is unnecessary to suggest an authoritative definition of happiness. We are seeking a way of life that will be a blessing both to ourselves and others—a blessing that we feel throughout the vicissitudes of life. It graces life as a whole and causes us to celebrate the fact that we are alive. We do not want to be plagued by the belief that our time has been a waste. We want to believe that we are using our days in large part to share in the most esteemed possibilities of human experience. We would want to believe, in all candor, that we have contributed well to events of human significance: that is, that our life has been meaningful. Call it “happy” or not, that would be an enviable life and wisely preferred to any other.

Such possibilities have traditionally been addressed by philosophers, but all sources of wisdom are to be welcomed with thanksgiving. Santayana and Dewey distinguished themselves in the noble venture. Yet neither of them, to be sure, has uttered the last word on these topics, and in some important respects both of their philosophies are flawed. Neither, for example, developed anything like a suitable idea of virtue—one that would be most functional in the conduct of life and blessed, as it were, by nature’s most formidable challenges. Yet no recent philosopher has come forth to approach such a demanding quest in anything but a piecemeal fashion, let alone done so in a convincing voice. It is a great pity that philosophy has lost its vitality and even its way. **fi**



Humans Are Hive Creatures

Jonathan Haidt



In my book *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, I examined ten ancient psychological claims and critiqued them, using modern research to tell a story about the optimum conditions for individuals to flourish. Most of these conditions are familiar, such as love, work, and control over one's life. But what you may not know—indeed I didn't, until I was almost finished with the book—is that happiness comes “from between.”

Buddhists and Stoics have long told us that happiness comes from within ourselves and that we should cultivate mental discipline instead of trying to make the world conform to our wishes. The common wisdom of the Western world tells us that happiness comes from outside ourselves—we strive to attain the things we want or need—a good lover, a good job, etc. But I have been forced to conclude that happiness does indeed come from between.

This notion kept suggesting itself through recurring images of webs and beehives. I saw hints of the idea in Durkheim's treatise on suicide, in which he found that those who were most closely connected to others were the least likely to kill themselves, while those who had the fewest ties were most at risk. I saw another hint in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of “vital engagement”—the characteristic of a person who has become engaged in a flow-giving practice and become involved with a community and a tradition related to the practice.

The idea intensified when I read the historian William McNeill's analysis of culturally and historically ubiquitous practices in which people move together in time (marching, dance, and religious ritual) and thereby unify the community in the pursuit of collective goals. The conclusion crystallized when I read David Sloane Wilson's book *Darwin's Cathedral*, which describes how multi-level group selection may have shaped the last hundred thousand years of human evolution. Wilson argues that gods (cultural products) and brains that give rise to religious experiences (biological products) co-evolved, because groups that could bind themselves together and suppress self-interest through cultural mechanisms (religions that preach cooperation and self-suppression) were more effective at competing with other groups.

It was an epiphany for me. As a social psychologist, I had spent my career studying individuals and the psychological mechanisms by which individuals think about other individuals. But suddenly, I realized that we social psychologists were like entomologists studying individual bees in a cage without knowing that the bees lived in hives. Everything fell into place, particularly the endur-

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ing appeal of religion. The human mind has been sculpted by recent evolution for life in hives—tribes held together by religious practices and sacralized traditions.

In the European Enlightenment, we busted out of our hives and invented ways of living more autonomously. This move unleashed torrents of human energy that had previously gone into hive maintenance and intergroup competition. It was now freed up for invention, creativity, and capitalism. We are all beneficiaries of this change.

But there has been a cost. While modern life presents us with endless possibilities for self-expression and self-gratification, many people find such a life ugly and pointless. Many people in Western societies hunger for meaning, community, and purpose. The hive was broken down in stages, from the Enlightenment through the anti-authoritarian 1960s, but many of our fellow citizens are now trying to put it back together. The extreme form of this urge is religious fundamentalism—the desire to structure families, schools, courts, and nations under God, using God’s laws as revealed in the Bible, the Qur’an, or other writings held sacred.

Most of the readers and writers of *FREE INQUIRY* are atheists, and many are hostile to religion. I, too, am an atheist, but, in researching *The Happiness Hypothesis*, I lost my hostility toward religion. Yes, theistic religions are all based on error (in my opinion). And yes, religions are obstacles to many reforms that would improve the quality of life for millions. But when we atheists try to do a cost-benefit analysis about religion, we get it wrong, because we are biased by hostility and unable to see certain benefits.

A recent analysis by the philosopher Patrick Grim put religiously inspired genocides, wars, and terrorist attacks on one side of the balance sheet and the altruism of missionary workers on the other, and then he disingenuously claimed that he was not sure whether religion came out in the red or the black. What we atheists often fail to see is that churches exert a constant pressure on their members to suppress self-interest and work for the good of others, even if those others are mostly other members of the church. When you add up these small bits of care, charity, and kindness, spread across billions of people for centuries, then Grim’s uncertainty becomes quite justified. When you add in the ways that religion enriches, deepens, and sacralizes people’s lives, and the fact that highly religious people are consistently found to be happier than others, I begin to suspect that the balance sheet for religion might show positive results.

I am not saying that religion is necessary for human well-being or for the creation of a moral community. Human flourishing and virtuous communities can be created without gods, but I believe that such communities will be satisfying to their members only if alternative ways can be found to give them the sense of coherence, community, and purpose that religions evolved (in tandem with our brains) to produce. Universities, for example, are great examples of such communities. They have stable departments nested within schools (or colleges) nested within the larger university (like the nested structure of the Catholic Church), and all their members pull together (at least occasionally) at the different levels of the organization. Universities have “sacred” values (truth and tolerance), shared heroes (Socrates, Newton, Shakespeare), annual rites (gradua-

tion, complete with special dress and diplomas in Latin), rivalries (with a few specific other universities), and an easy way for members to feel that they are contributing to something larger (the prestige of the university, the advancement of knowledge, the training of the next generation). I suspect that the high level of community, coherence, and purpose in academic life is one reason that atheism is so common at universities: academic communities already provide many of the benefits of religion.

Happiness comes not from within or from outside ourselves; it comes from getting the right relationships between an individual and others, between oneself and work, and something larger than oneself—some noble purpose that is pursued with a community of others. This is why religions, like universities, make hive creatures like us happy. **f**



The Round Square

By Jamey Hecht

Why is there a world at all? Guy stands up
and says,
God made the world, and as for who made
God, well,
That’s just a mystery beyond us. Woman
says,
A round square is not a mystery beyond us;
It’s neither real nor imaginary, it’s not a
concept,
Not an object, neither nothing nor an Entity.
He says, that’s what I’m saying, it’s
incomprehensible.
No, she says, there’s nothing there to
comprehend.
He says, of course there is, and we both
know it.
She says, you’re bobbing for apples of
relief, love
And immortality and along comes a word.
The word
Is a noun and pretty soon you’re making it
the subject
Of a world of verbs, and then the miracles
begin. She says,
God is logic’s corpse, a wound in reason,
grammar’s empty skin.

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Bertrand Russell and *The Conquest of Happiness*

Michael E. Berumen



Bertrand Russell was the most influential philosopher of the twentieth century, having written some of the most seminal works in both mathematical logic and analytic philosophy. During his long life, he was also one of the world's most celebrated public intellectuals. While occasionally infamous for his unconventional views, he received many honors, including the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950.

Russell had a narrow view of the proper subject matter for philosophy. He came to believe that even ethics was outside of philosophy's scope, for its main assertions were not empirically or logically verifiable. This did not stop him from sharing his views on ethics or on many other subjects, though he was careful to mention that he was not working in his capacity as a philosopher when he did so. Russell's felicity of expression, not to mention a devilish wit, made him popular with audiences who had little interest in his technical work. Several academic peers evinced contempt for Russell's fame outside of philosophy, believing him insufficiently profound and too glib. Among other things, he wrote about history, politics, education, marriage, atoms, relativity, religion, and happiness.

It is the last of these subjects that I shall expand upon, focusing mainly on the themes of his book, *The Conquest of Happiness*, first published in 1930. However, I should like to begin by saying something about Russell's long life.

Born in 1872 at the height of Britain's power, Russell had deep roots in the English aristocracy. Several family members were historically significant, including his grandfather, John Russell, who was prime minister in the mid-nineteenth century.

Russell's parents died when he was very young. Reared by his paternal grandmother and educated by a series of private tutors, he was a bookish and lonely boy. He later wrote that only his love of mathematics kept him from suicide. When he reached Trinity College at Cambridge, he found others with similar interests, whereupon his life took on new meaning.

His interest in philosophy soon blossomed. At Cambridge, he came under the influence of another student,

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Who Says Money Can't Buy Happiness?

As Nathan Bupp observes in his introduction to this feature, positive psychology may be “*the* humanistic inquiry *par excellence*.” That’s how we see it. Others seek to impose a different spin on how the public will interpret this field—at least, that’s one explanation for the John Templeton Foundation’s intense interest in positive psychology.

The John Templeton Foundation is the creation of mutual-fund billionaire Sir John Marks Templeton, a devout Presbyterian who is determined to reconcile science and religion. In 1972, he established an annual cash award, the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, specifying that its monetary value (now about \$1.5 million) should always exceed that of the Nobel Prize. Early winners included Mother Teresa and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. In later years, the prize acquired, if that is possible, an even more weirdly oxymoronic name—the Templeton Prize for Progress toward Research or Discoveries about Spiritual Realities—and tended to be awarded to scientists with a spiritual streak. Recent winners include Paul Davies, John Polkinghorne, and Cambridge cosmologist John Barrow.

In 1987, Sir John Templeton (he’d just been knighted) founded the Templeton Foundation to advance the agenda of the Templeton Prize on a larger scale. *Larger* is the word: after a 2005 injection of \$550 million, the Foundation holds \$1.1 billion in assets and is expected to disburse around \$120 million this year. (Sir John retired early in 2006, handing the reins to his born-again-Christian son, while specifying review procedures intended to prevent the Foundation’s agenda from skewing too rapidly to the right.)

Giving on that scale buys a lot of interest in science and religion. Templeton’s largesse has reshaped whole fields, sometimes insidiously, sometimes with paradoxical results. Its impact on medical education has been insidious: as a direct result of Foundation activity, almost three-quarters of the nation’s medical schools have

incorporated a scientifically dubious, Templeton-approved “spirituality and healing” course into their curricula.

Foundation influence on the sciences has leaned more toward the paradoxical. Unquestionably, the availability of Templeton funds has led some scientists to study, say, compatibilities between science and religion or anthropic views of the origin of the universe when they might otherwise have studied something else. Nowhere is this effect more apparent than in studies of forgiveness, a subject that fascinated Sir John and which is cited in some 4,500 scientific papers today—compared to a mere fifty ten years ago.

But there’s no evidence that Templeton funding has led recipients to do shoddy science, no smoking-gun scandal in which researchers rig data in order to, oh, make prayer appear more effective. On the contrary, a recent high-profile study actually produced evidence *against* the efficacy of healing prayer after absorbing some \$2 million in Templeton support. Also, to be sure, scientists with naturalistic worldviews have accepted Templeton honoraria to attend workshops and symposia without trimming their sails. To name three, Richard Dawkins, Steven Weinberg, and science writer John Horgan have accepted Templeton hospitality, yet made no effort to temper their atheism.

This background may help readers appreciate the blend of surprise and exasperation felt by some of the editors upon discovering that Templeton Foundation support is ubiquitous throughout positive psychology. Since 1999, the Foundation has underwritten a small Martin E.P. Seligman Award, named for the field’s pioneering researcher, as well as a Templeton Positive Psychology Prize. In classic Templeton style, its first prize of \$100,000 is the largest cash award in psychology. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, interviewed in this issue, was a founding member of the prize’s selection committee. Jonathan Haidt, who writes and is reviewed in this issue, was its 2001 recipient. These examples but scratch the surface of

Templeton’s dominance in funding research in positive psychology.

Again, there’s no hint that anyone is skewing their work toward Templeton’s presumed agenda in return for Foundation support. Still, more researchers are turning more attention toward positive psychology than would otherwise be the case. The question remains: if positive psychology is “*the* humanistic inquiry *par excellence*,” a discipline that may one day yield solid guidance in how to lead happier and more satisfying lives with or without religion, what’s in it for the Templeton Foundation?

We posed that question to the Foundation’s offices—twice—and received no reply. So, we are left to guess. Perhaps Templeton strategists recognize the potential of positive psychology to limn the contours of a happy, postreligious life and hope to prevent that outcome by co-opting leading workers in the field or influencing the way its findings are reported to the public, or both. Perhaps they expect positive psychology to demonstrate instead that religious commitment is essential for true happiness. Early studies claiming exactly that have drawn enormous attention—although, as Ken Livingston notes in this issue, the best of this work suggests that happiness correlates directly not with religiosity but with other factors (strong social networks or a firm sense of meaning in one’s life) that coincide with religious commitment but can also be attained by other means. Perhaps positive psychology’s focus on mental wellness, not illness, just “clicked” with Sir John Templeton’s upbeat view of human potential.

Leaving speculation aside, all we can do with confidence is to relish—cautiously—an ironic state of affairs. The field of psychology that best embodies the values of secular humanism is rising like a rocket, propelled in large part by the foundation that has been a powerful enemy of naturalism in medical education and has struggled to play a similar role in the sciences.

—Tom Flynn



G.E. Moore, with whom he would cofound the analytic movement, and of his mathematics professor and mentor, Alfred North Whitehead, with whom he would write *Principia Mathematica*, a multivolume monument to abstract reasoning.

Cloistered in the academic world and dedicated to scholarly pursuits, Russell still found time in 1894 to marry an American Quaker, Alys Smith. This would be the first of his four marriages.

He wrote a book on German democracy in 1896, soon followed by another on geometry. Russell's political activism emerged when he supported the women's suffrage movement, and he even stood for Parliament, though he lost. He became mentor to the other titan of twentieth-century philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who took Russell's early interest in linguistic analysis to the next level.

World War I seemed a tragic folly to Russell, and he joined the antiwar movement. In 1916, he was thrown in jail for his polemics against the war. He was dismissed by his beloved Trinity College, though he was eventually invited to return. While in jail for six months, he completed the *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, which remains a fine primer on the subject.

Russell wrote scores of books and hundreds of essays. His most important work on philosophy and logic was completed before 1930. He began to distance himself from the several schools of thought that germinated from his own work, especially the ideas of Wittgenstein, whom Russell thought had become too mystical. Having as a young man rejected belief in God as unsupportable, Russell became increasingly critical of the influence of religion, which he thought largely destructive. By 1940, his unorthodox and liberal views led to his being barred from teaching an advanced course in mathematical logic at City College of New York.

While he believed that most wars are unnecessary, Russell was no pacifist. He strongly favored defeating the Axis powers in World War II. After the Allied victory, he briefly advocated war against the Soviet Union to preclude the dominance of communism, which he loathed. He was essentially a democratic "guild socialist," as were many British intellectuals.

He soon abandoned his temporary hawkishness and became a principal in the nuclear-disarmament movement and an advocate of world government. Russell became something of a secular saint to the "New Left" in the 1960s, though he eventually let it be known that some youthful radicals misused his name for causes he did not support. He was an ardent and outspoken critic of America's military involve-

ment in Vietnam. Russell died of pneumonia in 1970.

It is evident from Russell's autobiographical material and correspondence that he had many bouts with depression and that they diminished in frequency and intensity only after he reached his fifties. Perhaps it is not altogether surprising that Russell would write about happiness, given his own personal struggles for contentment. The subject was also in keeping with his general outlook on ethical matters, informed partly by the writings of his godfather, John Stuart Mill, a leading representative of the utilitarian school. There are several species of utilitarianism, but the most common holds that the main goal of ethics is to spread the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number.

Russell was unaware of what we now know about depression, brain chemistry, and pharmacology, so some of his thinking is old-fashioned. An avid student of science and admirer of the scientific method, he would have been quick to adopt the prevailing scientific knowledge. Some of his views on the sexes and other matters are antiquated, though it should be remembered that Russell was at the leading edge of progressive thought in his day. Allowing for such things, his *The Conquest of Happiness* is replete with observations and prescriptions grounded in common sense, and many of his ideas hold up well. Moreover, his mastery of English prose and his rapier wit make it easy and fun to read.

Russell did not write this book for people unable to remedy their circumstances, whether due to the exigencies of poverty, oppression, mental illness and other diseases, or even tragic personal circumstances. He was not so foolish as to believe that anyone could overcome any adversity. He wrote it for people not beset with the most serious obstacles—those who were most likely to read it in the first place. Furthermore, while he thought the absence of unhappiness was a necessary condition for happiness, he did not see it as a sufficient condition; rather, happiness was something one had to acquire, indeed, *conquer*, as the title suggests.

The first part of the book deals with the principal sources of unhappiness. Russell begins by describing "Byronic unhappiness," or the tendency of intellectuals and world-weary people to equate wisdom with despair rooted in cynicism. The dyspeptic perspective of certain existentialist philosophers might be representative of such an outlook. He then writes about the dangers of excessive competitiveness,

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focusing primarily on commercial affairs, for which, like many academics, Russell betrays a subtle disdain. However, he readily admits that excessive competitiveness exists also in artistic and scholarly pursuits, as well as in other human endeavors.

Next, he takes on boredom, which he believes is a particularly human problem, and largely a product of monotony, though he says modern humans have much less about which to be bored than our ancestors. At the same time, he eschews “excitement” over the fleeting pleasures that leave one feeling empty, using the kind of satisfaction derived from gambling as an example.

Russell then goes on to discuss the problems of fatigue, often induced by having too much to do, the bane of people who work too hard or have too many interests; envy, an especially pernicious source of unhappiness caused by coveting what we don’t have or can’t possibly have, and, often enough, don’t really need; “persecution mania,” the idea that one is the constant object of the plots and malefactions of others; and the oppressive fear of public opinion, which stultifies the personal freedom necessary for creative growth.

Of particular interest among Russell’s sources of unhappiness is our “sense of sin.” As I said at the outset, Russell thought religion was a major cause of human misery in the world, not least of all due to the feelings of guilt it engenders. The propensity to focus on one’s lack of virtue is merely a form of self-absorption, one which can be so overwhelming as to make us not only unhappy but irrational and even irresponsible. Russell would be horror-struck by the religious apologists populating today’s airwaves, those who believe godless liberalism and an insufficient sense of human wretchedness are the chief causes of psychological disorders and society’s downfall.

Many of the ideas about what constituted sinfulness were absurd to Russell, especially in matters dealing with sexuality. He certainly understood that one can violate a rational code of conduct; however, constantly dwelling on our failures is counterproductive. According to Russell, one should “regard his own undesirable acts, as he regards those of others, as acts produced by certain circumstances, and to be avoided by a fuller realization that they are undesirable, or, where this is possible, by avoidance of the circumstances that caused them” (*Conquest of Happiness*, pp. 71–72).

Russell devoted fewer pages to the matter of acquiring happiness, probably because the formula for it seemed more obvious to him. He realized perfect happiness is not simply

what philosophers from Plato to Mill imagined it to be, namely, the rarified pleasures of contemplating philosophy. It is clear from his discussions about the joy derived from more mundane things that he did not entirely buy Mill’s famous dictum, “Better Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.” While not denying the pleasures of the intellect, he did not give them undue weight. However, he did believe scientists might enjoy some advantages over others, for the scientist is able to “utilize his abilities to the full, and he achieves results which appear important not only to himself but to the general public, even when it cannot in the smallest degree understand them. In this, he is more fortunate than the artist” (p. 103).

According to Russell, the common denominator among all happy people is “zest,” by which he roughly meant a kind of joyous interest in the multifarious aspects of our lives, not with excessive zeal, but with moderation in an Aristotelian sense. People with such a balanced but engaged temperament are likely to be happier than their counterparts, who could range from one who would starve oneself at one end of the spectrum to a gourmand at the other end.

Russell then described the importance of both giving and receiving affection; having meaningful and productive work to do, but not to excess; having one or more avocational interests to challenge the mind, perhaps even benefiting others in the process, while preventing monotony and boredom; and placing satisfying effort into the things that one can meaningfully improve, at the same time understanding when one ought to be resigned to insurmountable realities. While external factors can impede happiness, and in some cases make it unattainable, Russell also believed that, when circumstances allow, it is important not to wait passively for it, as it does not “drop into the mouth, like a ripe fruit, by the mere operation of fortunate circumstances” (p. 167).

On a final note, Russell also wrote about the importance of having close family relationships. His own family ties were strained for most of his life, except when his three children were quite young, and later during his marriage to Edith Finch—his last—which by all accounts was a happy one. His daughter, Katherine Tait, wrote in *My Father Bertrand Russell* (1975), “He was the most fascinating man I have ever known, the only man I ever loved, the greatest man I shall ever meet, the wittiest, the gayest, the most charming. It was a privilege to know him, and I thank God he was my father.” This would have made Russell *very* happy, despite the object of her gratitude. ■■

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The Fullness of Life

Paul Kurtz



I have spent a good deal of my career reflecting on the nature of happiness. This has been central to my writings on ethics. Teleological conceptions of the good have been a key focus of ethical theories from the time of the ancient Greeks to the present. The task was to seek the good life; and philosophers from Plato and Aristotle, through Epicurus and Leucetius, down to Spinoza, Bentham, and Mill have taken the attainment of happiness as the basic goal of life.

Generally, there have been two major theories: (1) hedonism, which emphasizes the satisfaction of pleasure and the avoidance of pain; and (2) self-actualization, the creative fulfillment of a person's potentialities. I have in my writings attempted to blend both satisfaction and realization into a unified normative theory of what it is possible to achieve.

However, I have come to recognize that the good is not simply happiness nor well-being, best seen at the end of life in a final summation, but what I have called the "fullness of life"; that is, we want to maximize the enrichment of experience throughout our lives. To focus on happiness as the end in one sense leaves out the pervasive character of the full life well lived, in which a variety of experiences are enjoyed and savored for their intrinsic qualities and for their contribution to a life that is throbbing and pulsating with enrichment and activity, and in which there is constant discovery, adventure, and excitement. Many people believe that happiness is the recognition that one has attained well-being in a consummatory sense, that is, a complete life that is well lived.

I grant all of this, but I wish to emphasize that the fullness of life is ongoing and that life at all stages—infancy, youth, adolescence, maturity, and growing old—manifests meaningful qualities throughout. There is, of course, the ebb and flow, the bountiful and tragic dimensions of living: joy and harmony but also pain and sorrow, success and failure, a sense of achievement and also remorse.

The element that I would emphasize is the *constant flow and process, change and challenge* that we encounter at all stages of life. We meet new people who become friends or adversaries, companions or mere acquaintances, lovers or enemies. It is a full life that we seek, one that is interesting and fascinating, though there are boring, even exasperating times. This life is enriched by constant excitement and passion, reflection and surprise, activity and quietude.

Now, I am aware that many who seek happiness are seeking release, peace, quietude—and this is surely part of the full life. But it needs to be balanced with creative

Paul Kurtz is the editor of FREE INQUIRY, a professor emeritus of philosophy at the University at Buffalo, and the chair of the Center for Inquiry.

openness to newly discovered experiences, like the first time one took a roller-coaster ride, drank a Cuba Libre, had an orgasm, heard a new composition, witnessed a powerful play or opera, read an insightful book, or took part in a new venture. What this means is that the quest for an *end state* of happiness may cause us to miss the boat, for the boat keeps moving, to stretch the metaphor. I have used the term *exuberance*, but we need to add to that enrichment and discovery, a receptiveness to the multifaceted life of ongoing change and exploration. A person who has obtained this has met so many people, done so many things, traveled to so many places, been to so many parties, spent hours and days in thoughtful reflection, and lived passionately, yet has also discovered truths and perhaps attained some wisdom. He or she has worked hard for beloved causes that exacted energy and were enormously uplifting as worthy ideals to bring into being or for moral deeds for the benefit of others. The

good life is therefore one that is overflowing with possibility and opportunity, so that a person feels at times as if he or she is “bursting at the seams.”

“... I have come to recognize that the good is not simply happiness nor well-being, best seen at the end of life in a final summation, but what I have called the ‘fullness of life.’...”

This kind of life was possible for only the rulers of empires in the past; the bulk of mankind was condemned to a life of drudgery and labor in order to survive. Today, we do not wish merely to survive but to exult and exude, and this possibility is now available to large sections of the population of the contemporary world, for we increasingly have the means to realize our powers to become what we want in order to live a life of enrichment and discovery. It is the interesting life that is dramatic, evocative, ennobling, and fulfilling that post-postmodern men and women can now live and enjoy. And that is an ideal that we should strive to realize. The full life is increasingly within the grasp today of virtually anyone who lives in an affluent society that is free, open, and democratic—a life of excellence and perhaps even nobility. **ff**

AFFIRMATIONS

Joyful and Creative Exuberance

Paul Kurtz

131 pp • ISBN 1-59102-389-0 • PB • \$14

In this optimistic, life-affirming book, philosopher Paul Kurtz succinctly outlines the main characteristics of happiness. Centered on human concerns and employing rational and scientific methods to determine objective truth, *Affirmations* is dedicated to the development of individual potential.

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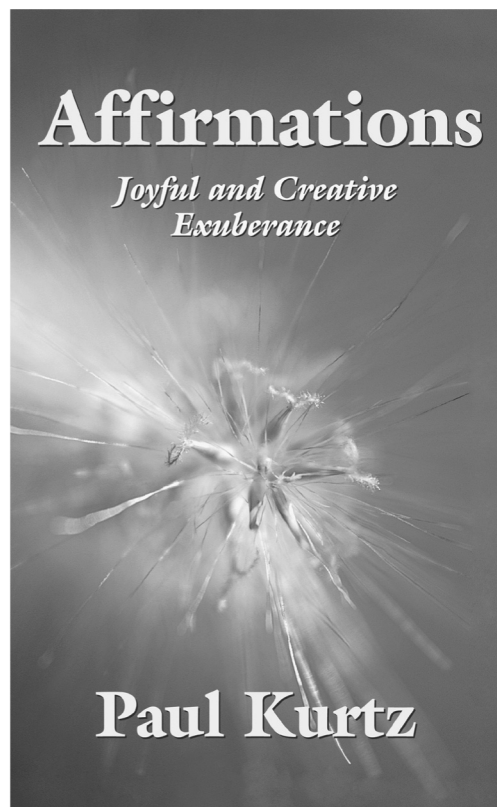
Regarding the perennial search for happiness, Kurtz affirms that secularism holds great promise. Through creative action in the pursuit of goals focused on the enhancement of human welfare, each person has the best chance of realizing a meaningful life of joyful exuberance.

Kurtz goes on to show how this realistic and fulfilling life stance is expressed in various human endeavors: achieving excellence, joyful exuberance, eroticism, being a good parent, loving another person, a good marriage or civil union, finding meaning in life, striving for a beloved cause, facing death with courage, and creating a planetary community.



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Edd Doerr and Tom Flynn

▼ A U.S. District Court judge rejected a lawsuit by atheist Michael Newdow challenging the motto “In God We Trust” on currency and coins, ruling that the motto had a “purely secular . . . ‘ceremonial character’” and “no theological or ritualistic impact.” Newdow will appeal. ▲ A federal judge ruled that Iowa violated the First Amendment when it funded a faith-based prison program run by Charles Colson’s Prison Fellowship Ministries, which must repay \$1.5 million to the state. ▲ A federal appeals court ruled that a suit challenging Notre Dame University’s management of a \$500,000 federal grant can go forward. Appellate judge Richard Posner wrote that a grant-funded program to train Catholic school teachers in poor districts was used “to indoctrinate students and teachers in Catholic dogma.” — TF

School Vouchers Nixed—On July 14, the U.S. Department of Education (of the pro-voucher Bush administration) released without fanfare two reports showing that nonpublic schools are on average no better than public schools—this despite the fact that nonpublic schools commonly practice forms of selectivity and discrimination unavailable to public schools. In plain English, nonpublic schools can and do select the students they want (not to mention the fact that the particular sectarian nature of a nonpublic school determines which families apply for admission; few Catholics and Jews likely send their kids to conservative Protestant schools). This is a main reason why nonpublic schools enroll proportionately fewer poor, disadvantaged, problem, handicapped, and minority kids.

This report should deal a serious blow to the unending campaign to compel all taxpayers to support faith-based schools by means of school vouchers or their analogue, tuition tax credits, a

Edd Doerr is the chair of Americans for Religious Liberty and the former president of the American Humanist Association. Tom Flynn is the editor of FREE INQUIRY.

campaign that if successful would wreck the First Amendment and fragment our society along religious, ethnic, class, political, and other lines. Have some people learned nothing from Iraq, Northern Ireland, or the former Yugoslavia?

Department of Education spokesman Chad Colby, according to *The New York Times*, offered no praise for public schools and said he did not expect the findings to “influence policy.” Colby added that the “overall comparison of the two types of schools is of modest utility.”

“Conservative Christian
schools engage in pervasive
sectarian indoctrination,
a prime reason for
their very existence and
why they should not
be publicly funded.”

Modest utility, my Aunt Fanny! But what else could one expect from the Bush administration? The report should rip the guts out of the voucher movement.

One important finding of the report is that “Conservative Christian” schools, the ones pushing hardest for vouchers, scored significantly lower than public schools in math.

This brings us to an important point. Conservative Christian schools engage in pervasive sectarian indoctrination, a prime reason for their very existence and why they should not be publicly funded. — ED

▼ In a win for confusion, Texas granted a religious tax-exemption to a local freethought group, the Texas Church of Freethought. Some church-state advocates hailed the decision. But expect Religious Right advocates to embrace this as one more “proof” that atheism, freethought, and secular humanism are stealth religions. ▲ A Washington high school properly barred a commencement performance of the hymn *Ave Maria* by a student ensemble. ▼ Following a conclusive lower-court decision requiring San Diego to remove a twenty-nine-foot cross from a city park, the U. S. Supreme Court stayed the lower-court ruling. On July 20, the U. S. House of Representatives voted 349–74 to acquire the cross and the land it sits on. (Like it will be any more constitutional for the federal government to display a towering cross!) — TF

Vouchers Redux—A mere four days after these reports were released, Senate and House Republican leaders joined Education Secretary Margaret Spellings in announcing the introduction of a new school-voucher plan, using the Orwellian term “opportunity scholarships.” The idea is to use “disadvantaged” kids as a crowbar to pry open the public treasury to allow faith-based schools and sectarian special interests to feed at the public trough. These same politicians have already shortchanged the so-called No Child Left Behind program by \$40 billion. These guys have given a new set of meanings to the word *chutzpah* and thumbed their noses at the millions of voters who have rejected vouchers in twenty-five state referenda by a 2 to 1 margin. — ED

▲ A North Texas couple has filed suit to void the state’s 2003 moment-of-silence law, which they regard as “a ruse to get prayer in school without calling it prayer in school.” ▼ Florida adopted “In God We Trust” as the state’s official motto. ▲ For the first time, a federal judge has ruled that a Roman Catholic priest accused of child molestation can legally be considered an employee of the Vatican, allowing the Holy See to be included in a sex-abuse lawsuit despite its status as a sovereign nation. — TF

TF

The Nature of the Literary Evidence: A Dialogue on Methodology, Part 1

Herewith—and with apologies to David Hume—a whimsical dialogue summarizes the difficulties that face apologists who seek to construct a coherent account of the earliest years of Islam.—EDS.

Ibn Warraq

All we know is what we have been told. With neither artifact nor archive, the student of Islamic origins could easily become victim of a literary and linguistic conspiracy.

—John Wansbrough, *Res Ipsa Loquitur: History and Mimesis*, Albert Einstein Memorial Lecture, Jerusalem, 1986

IBN CLEANTHES: My dear friend, we are indeed lucky in having so many details of the life of the Prophet; we can practically follow his daily movements, listen to his homilies, speeches, read his letters, and have his opinion on countless subjects of the utmost importance to regulate our humble lives. The Prophet has set us an example that we would all do well to emulate, a source of comfort in this profane and irreligious age. What say you, Philo, come, let us hear your sentiments.

IBN PHILO: Without wishing to vex you or to disturb your piety, I venture to say that you seem unacquaint-

Ibn Warraq is the author of Why I Am Not a Muslim and the editor of The Origins of the Koran and What the Koran Really Says. This article is an excerpt from his The Quest for the Historical Muhammad, (Prometheus Books, 2000).

ed with science and profound inquiry, particularly into the evidence for our knowledge of the Prophet's life.

CLEANTHES: Come, Philo, enough of your skeptical pleasantries. You do not deny that there are over seventy historians that have written about the rise of Islam, the life of Muhammad, and so on. Surely, we have more documentary evidence about Muhammad than Jesus Christ.

PHILO: Yes, we do know the *names* of some seventy historians for the period up to 1000 C.E., but the writings of the earliest historians have not survived. They are quoted by later historians, writing over a hundred years after the events they purport to describe. Thus, there is scarcely a *sira* text that dates back to the first century of Islam.

CLEANTHES: What of our beloved *sira* by Ibn Ishaq, a copy of which I have here next to my bed? What of all the details that he gives us?

PHILO: Ibn Ishaq wrote over a hundred years after the *Hijra*. As to the putative details, dear Cleanthes,

A biography of the Prophet Muhammad.

An historian, d. ca. 767 C.E., author of the earliest biography of Muhammad.

Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Median in 622 C.E.

we do not have many for the early years of the Prophet's life; we know scarce little of his childhood or his early education and development, and we probably never shall. The details that he does give cannot be trusted, and we do not seem to have any objective way to verify them: no external source against which to compare or judge them. We are dealing with theocrat-

ic legend. Can we really call figures like Ibn Hisham, Ibn Ishaq, and Abu Mikhnaf "historians"? For, as you know full well, the Greek word for history, *historein*, simply means to inquire or investigate, which is what Herodotus set out to do, whereas the writers of the *sira* give us the impression that they did not set out with the same purpose; rather, they *bore witness*; an altogether different activity and aim. They indulged in what R.G. Collingwood calls "theocratic history," which "means not history proper, that is, scientific history, but a statement of known facts for the information of persons to whom they are not known, but who, as worshippers of the god in question, ought to know the deeds whereby he has made himself manifest." Of course, Muslims do not worship Muhammad, and he is not a god, but *mutatis mutandis*, Collingwood's remarks apply equally to Muslim "historians" and their hagiographic attitude toward the Prophet and his supposed deeds. They did not distinguish the "duty of reporting from the legitimacy of believing."

CLEANTHES: Yes, but Ibn Ishaq must have talked to many people who had known the Companions of the Prophet.

PHILO: True, but we cannot rely upon a purely oral tradition to scientifically reconstruct the events at the dawn of Islam. The chances are that the material being transmitted will have undergone a considerable amount of change: people's memories may have failed them, and their prejudices, even fears of being accused of impiety, will have affected, distorted, or altered the contents of what was being transmitted. In any case, it is not at all certain that people living the events that are later seen to be of significance see them as such, and it is highly improbable that anyone (assuming he was literate) thought of recording the details that he was living through. Tendency to exaggerate or even to fabricate details will have been great. Furthermore, we do not even have Ibn Ishaq's book.

CLEANTHES: Ah, Philo, you indulge in raillery and artificial malice. Otherwise, what can one say of your paradoxes? What, do you expect to be able to explain away the existence of this volume that I have perused nearly every day for the last twenty years? Although I do not hold the original book in my hand, it must, nonetheless, lie somewhere in some museum or library, with the paper slightly yellowed undoubtedly but unmistakably bearing the handwriting of Ibn Ishaq himself, in short, a volume that has survived inviolate from the eighth century.

PHILO: No, I trifle not, Cleanthes. First, it seems unlikely that Ibn Ishaq had access to paper, which was only first being manufactured in Baghdad in the late eighth century; the oldest paper with Arabic writing on

D. 828 or 833 C.E., an historian who edited Ibn Ishaq's biography of Muhammad.

Abu Mikhnaf, D. 744 C.E., who is said to have written many histories, none of which has survived, and some once attributed to him are now known to be forgeries.

1889–1943 C.E., British philosopher and historian; author of *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

it, found in Egypt, dates from between 796 and 815. Second, the original work of Ibn Ishaq has been lost, and we only possess the recension of Ibn Hisham, someone who died over two hundred years after the *Hijra*. Ibn Hisham got Ibn Ishaq's work from the latter's pupil, al-Bakkai. So the work that you optimistically call Ibn Ishaq's is really Ibn Hisham's version, much abbreviated, edited, and even altered by Ibn Hisham, of al-Bakkai's copy. Thus, we depend entirely on Ibn Ishaq's transmitters, of which there are at least fifteen. In other words, his biography of the Prophet, that you keep by your side, dear Cleanthes, has not been preserved as a single work. We do not possess an autographed manuscript of his work, and we are entirely dependent for our knowledge of what he wrote on manuscripts well-removed from the original. And even the various versions of his text that we do possess are full of discrepancies and contradictions concerning both dates and the contents, reminding us that texts copied by hand are very quickly liable to corruption; it really is not so easy as you think to make an accurate copy. In any case, there seems to be no nonarbitrary way of deciding between the various versions.

CLEANTHES: What of al-Tabari's use of Ibn Ishaq? Does he not frequently quote him? Can we not reconstruct Ibn Ishaq's original from al-Tabari, and perhaps from some of Ibn Ishaq's more reliable pupils?

PHILO: Al-Tabari was as selective as Ibn Hisham, and as Lawrence I. Conrad has argued, "here too personal criteria of selection and al-Tabari's explicitly stated intention of giving versions of events which

enjoyed the general assent of the Community would lead us to expect from him not a verbatim transcription of the text, but a redaction which Muslims in the late third century A.H. Would have found appropriate and useful." In any event, it is probable that al-Tabari was often quoting from memory, in which case again, it is unlikely that we would have verbatim transcriptions.

As for Ibn Ishaq's pupils, I perhaps gave the impression that it was only a matter of correcting the errors of the scribes and copyists. But as Conrad has observed, "Ibn Ishaq's numerous students and their successors took what they received from the master and redacted and transmitted it in different ways. Witness, for example, the differences between Ibn Hisham, the quotations in al-Tabari, the recension of Yunus ibn Bukayr, and that of Muhammad ibn Salama al-Harrani. As different lines of transmission represent potentially different redactions, efforts to reconstruct the original form of a text cannot simply combine quotations from different lines of transmission, as if Ibn Ishaq's students and their successors were making no revisions or changes of their own. Transmitters did not limit themselves to passing on what they had received from their teachers, but rather laid claim to the role of adapting and revising their materials as they saw fit, not just by the well-known means of the collective *isnad*, but also by rearranging, abbreviating, expanding, and recasting.

CLEANTHES: But, dear Philo, you do tire me. I must own, I never know if you are in earnest or in jest. But

After the *Hijra*.

D. 815 C.E., compiled details for a biography of Muhammad; his version of Ibn Ishaq's biography differs from other versions.

D. 806 C.E., a transmitter of Ibn Ishaq's biography of Muhammad.

A list of the transmitters of the teachings and life/history of Muhammad.

D. 799 C.E., a pupil of Ibn Ishaq and one of the transmitters of the latter's biography of Muhammad.

D. 923 C.E., an historian and Qur'anic commentator.

A professor of Islamic studies at the University of Hamburg; the author of "Recovering Lost Texts," which appears in *The Quest for the Historical Muhammad*, ed. Ibn Warraq.

D. 728 C.E., an early historian to whom much was attributed that was not written by him.

arguments in the hands of a man of ingenuity like yourself do acquire an air of probability. Did we not find in recent years papyri bearing the works of **Wahb ibn Munabbih**, who was born in 654, hence, by the time he was twenty, he must have met many people who were eyewitnesses to the events described in the *sira*?

PHILO: Yes, indeed. But one must distinguish between when the actual physical papyrus that we pos-

sess was written and when the text that it contains was first composed. In this case, the papyrus dates back to only the ninth century, though a part of the text seems to go back to Wahb. So once again, we cannot be sure that we have an unadulterated text, since too great a time gap exists between the composition of the text and the copying of the papyrus that we possess. **f i**

(To be continued.—Eds.)

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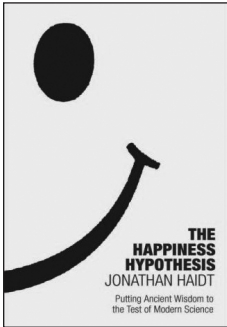
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ACHIEVING HAPPINESS



David L. Weiner

The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom—Why the Meaningful Life Is Closer Than You Think, by Jonathan Haidt (New York: Perseus Books, 2006, ISBN 0-465-02802-0) 297 pp. Paper \$15.95.

Can we create higher levels of happiness for ourselves that endure? According to psychologist Jonathan Haidt, “Happiness is not something that you can find, acquire, or achieve directly. You have to get the conditions right and then wait.”

We each have a happiness set point, he writes, that is genetically based, according to twin studies, and then culturally shaped. We may have moments of great elation—when we buy luxury homes we have long dreamed of, win important competitive contests, or enter into passionate, sexually based love affairs—but soon, we “adapt” to the circumstances and we revert to our basic happiness set points. Conversely, we may suffer great setbacks: we lose our jobs, we are transferred into positions with miserable bosses, or one of our parents dies. Over time, most of us recover from such setbacks, and we again revert to our set points.

Happiness, Haidt writes, is based on the formula $H(\text{appiness}) = S(\text{et point}) + C(\text{onditions of our lives}) + V(\text{oluntary activities that we do})$. The conditions of our lives include work, relationships, outlooks, general positions in life—all the very basic circumstances we wake up to day after day. If we are satisfied with them, if they have met our expectations, we may feel happiness above our genetically based set points. If we are not, our happiness may be operat-

ing below our set points and these conditions are usually difficult to change. Less difficult are the voluntary activities: finding avocations that become callings if our work lives are dull, for instance, or doing kind and charitable things as a daily feature of our lives that over time can raise our set points.

As a theme of this impressively researched book, Haidt compares the proverbs of “ancient wisdom” related to leading a satisfying and fulfilling life to the results of relatively current psychological research related to happiness. For example, he cites an Egyptian text from around 1300 B.C.E., the end of which states, “Better is bread with a happy heart than wealth with vexation.” He compares that to recent psychological research indicating that attainment of power and material objects are not a sure road to elevated happiness, citing the adaptation principle. Among Haidt’s lessons from the past include quotations and reflections from the Bible, Buddha, Confucius, Dickens, Darwin, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Nietzsche, among a myriad of others, which, he points out, “rely heavily on maxims and role models rather than proofs and logic.” However, the psychological research he points to as confirming these maxims comes from empirical studies, which while frequently obvious and convincing, are subject to the criticism of many in the scientific community that such work is not “real science.” The barrier, as Francis Crick and other scientists have pointed out, is that you can’t open the skull and tinker with a live human brain.

As one result, what we are learning empirically today via observation is no more than a reiteration of the observations that underlie empirical ancient wisdom. Despite all of our technological advances, the world is no less a mess than it ever was. One reason for that is the legion of modern believers who continue to follow their ancient and more recent predecessors in seeing the world at its very basic level as a contest between good and evil, with frequent disagreement between cultures, religions, and other categories of humanity over who the players are on the opposing sides. Haidt calls this “the myth of pure evil.” And so, we continue to crusade against each other’s evildoers, who on either side may be psychopathic or harbor psychopathic tendencies, and are thus ruthless, unabashed, and uninhibited enough to carry out ugly deeds. Psychopaths alone are estimated to make up as high as 1 percent of the population of the world, most of whom are not in prison and can cause havoc when they assume positions of power. And, as Haidt rightly points out, people with psychopathic tendencies, along with others with warped outlooks who comprise an even higher percent of the population, are beyond rational persuasion. The homilies of wisdom that focus on virtue continue to fall on their deaf ears, and the world today remains as frustrated with elevating the mean and ruthless as it has been through recorded history.

That being said, how do the more normal of us determine what our individual happiness set points are? Haidt recommends a test at www.authentic-happiness.org, a site maintained by the University of Pennsylvania, the home base of Martin Seligman, who has been a leader in establishing the field of positive psychology. The test is a short one and gives you a number between one and six, with six being the highest set point. These set points appear similar to “pleasure thresholds,” which can range from anhedonia, a complete inability to feel pleasure, to hypomania. Pleasure thresholds are elucidated in studies of pleasure and displeasure, and are neatly summarized in the compendium, *Pleasure Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, edited by Stanley Bone and Robert Glick

David Weiner is a science writer who specializes in the biology of emotions. His most recent book is Reality Check: What Your Mind Knows but Isn't Telling You (Prometheus, 2005).

(Yale University Press, 1990), the title of which is a takeoff on Freud's 1920 book, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. However, neither Haidt nor Seligman, the latter in his book, *Authentic Happiness* (Free Press, 2002), refers to this historical work. Research psychiatrist Norman Doidge, in a paper in the compendium, describes the threshold as a mediator of the stimulation required to feel pleasure. If one is low on the threshold, in a reverse construct of the happiness set points, one is usually happy and enthusiastic with little need for artificial stimulation. If high on the threshold, the propensity for stimulation, such as the use of alcohol, cocaine, or other appetitive stimuli, is also high. We might assume these propensities for stimulation—in reverse—also apply to Haidt's happiness set points.

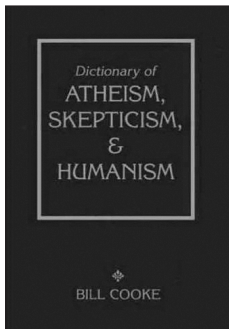
What then does it take to raise our happiness set points if we are indeed unhappy with our rating, realizing that some people, who are basically unhappy, even some among the clinically depressed, cherish those feelings? They believe they deserve to be unhappy and depressed, so please, don't tamper with them. Then there are sadists, those with sadistic personality disorder (as described in the *DSM III*), who might be loathe to give up their condition that gives them happiness highs when they succeed in making others miserable.

Haidt runs through a litany of solutions focusing in general on work and love. He describes the work of psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, author of *Flow* (Harper, 1991), who also works closely with Seligman in the field of positive psychology. The theory in a nutshell is that if you find a job in

a field you really enjoy, you can get lost in it. This will engender happiness and make time fly. Being altruistic and kind and following the virtues as a basic tenet of one's life can also make one feel happier. So can romantic love or love of our family and friends and, for some, a religious belief. If we suffer from neuroses that are overwhelming our lives, Haidt suggests the use of meditation, cognitive therapy, or drugs like Prozac—he describes his own remarkable experience with the lattermost. Haidt goes into considerable detail about these and other suggestions, following his thesis that to achieve higher levels of enduring happiness, "you have to get the conditions right and then wait."

For those of us who seek a boost, that can be a tall order, but Haidt is signaling hope. **f i**

AN AUTHORITY ON ATHEISM



William Harwood

Dictionary of Atheism, Skepticism, & Humanism, edited by Bill Cooke (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2006, ISBN 1-59102-299-1) 606 pp. Cloth \$70.00.

The function of a dictionary or encyclopedia is to provide easily accessible statistical information about a variety of often-related subjects. While a dictionary is bound to reflect the philosophical viewpoint of its editor(s), it nonetheless can also be used as a source for nonessential information, although it cannot itself be cited as a reference as if its assertions were as substantiated as those of a *William Harwood is the author of the Dictionary of Contemporary Mythology and Mythology's Last Gods and the editor/translator of The Compact Fully Translated Bible.*

scholarly treatise. As an obvious example, Catholic encyclopedias spell out dogmas rejected even by other Christian sects as if they were facts of history.

In the *Dictionary of Atheism*, editor Bill Cooke shows his recognition of that reality when he defines *objectivity* as "a word that many people suppose to be the same as their opinions. Genuine objectivity, however, is a far more difficult condition to reach."

Dictionaries compiled from humanistic, nontheistic, skeptical perspectives, if not totally unbiased, at least have the advantage of attempted objectivity,

because their compilers do not have an axe to grind or a theology to propagandize at any cost. The *Dictionary of Atheism* is as unbiased in this respect as can reasonably be expected. When Cooke, writing about abstinence, concludes that, "There is no evidence that abstinence has any other [than as a means to avoid STDs and pregnancy] positive function," that is undoubtedly the position from which he started, but it is also consistent with all competent subsequent research, as the opinions expressed in propagandizing works are not.

In response to the accusation that nontheists "believe in nothing," Cooke writes, "This prejudice is preposterous. Freethinkers of any persuasion are identified by what they believe. What is more, many of the things they believe are the same things religious people believe. The importance of civic virtues, personal responsibility, compassion for those who suffer, the facts of science, the beauty of nature . . . the list goes on." He is equally devastating in his annihilation of the big lie that there are no atheists in foxholes.

Cooke's entry on *glossalalia* is approximately the same length as my own in my *Dictionary of Contemporary Mythology*. Mine begins, "Gibberish spouted by religious fundamentalists who believe they are speaking a

sacred language comprehensible only to their sectarian god." Cooke's ends, "No independent study has ever demonstrated that glossalalia is anything more than a psychological condition brought on by the emotional intensity of an occasion or the need to secure the attention of one's associates." Both entries mention missionary Paul's reference to "speaking in tongues" but offer different explanations of what Paul meant. And Cooke's entry on *playing god* consists of three paragraphs, whereas my entry is limited to the single sentence: "It's a dirty job, but there's no one else to do it."

Among other points of disagreement is Cooke's translation of *Hizbullah* as "party of god." It actually means "party of Allah." And despite the politically correct pretense that the Muslim *Allah*, the Jewish *Yahweh*, and the Germanic *God* are the same deity, they are not, as Osama bin Laden makes clear every time he orders the murder of devotees of an opposing god. And Cooke consistently echoes the absurd pretense that Christianity, with its three primary gods, dozens of secondary gods called angels, and thousands of third-ranking gods called saints, as well as Islam and

Judaism, with their planetary gods under new names (Mercury/Gabriel, Venus/Satan, Mars/Michael), are all monotheistic.

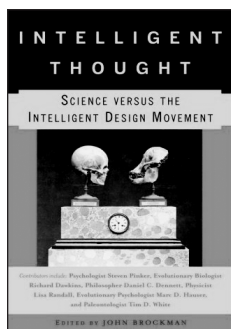
Cooke's entry on *bright* as a catch-all term for nontheists, while acknowledging that it won some initial support from persons who failed to look at its implications, recognizes that it has not and will not win acceptance from the theist majority for a very good reason. Heterosexuals have no difficulty denying that they are "gay." Does anyone seriously suggest that theists will ever agree that they are not "bright"? With any luck, Cooke's handling of this ill-advised invention of a new label for a much-maligned minority will put the final nail in the *bright* epithet's coffin.

Numerous entries provide a concise summary of concepts most people have heard of but know little or nothing about, including alternative medicine, the argument from design, The Bonfire of the Vanities, bread and circuses, the cosmological argument, Immaculate Conception (which is *not* about the conception of Jesus), the Inquisition, opium of the people, Opus Dei, Pascal's wager, the pathetic fallacy, psychoanalysis (described as a

"long discredited pseudoscientific fad" that nonetheless did not diminish Freud's status as "one of the most influential thinkers of the first decades of the twentieth century"), and social Darwinism. And the entry on suicide bombers spells out the historical context of a phenomenon about which most people know only what they see on television.

The *Dictionary of Atheism* contains 1,600 entries, compared to a similar number in Michael Shermer's *The Skeptic's Encyclopedia*, the 666 in James Randi's *Encyclopedia of Claims*, the 400 in Robert Carroll's *The Skeptic's Dictionary*, and the 3,500 in my *Dictionary of Contemporary Mythology*. I am not about to say that more is better (that would be self-serving). In fact, with Cooke's smaller print and equal number of pages, his book contains more useful information than any of the above, and Prometheus is justified in comparing it to Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary*, Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*, and Joseph McCabe's *Rationalist Encyclopedia*. It belongs in every thinker's (or freethinker's) reference library. **11**

KITZMILLER AND BEYOND



Glenn Branch

Intelligent Thought: Science versus the Intelligent Design Movement, edited by John Brockman (New York: Vintage, 2006, ISBN 0-307-27722-4) 256 pp. Paper \$14.00.

Glenn Branch is the deputy director of the National Center for Science Education, a nonprofit organization that works to defend the teaching of evolution in the public schools. He is the coeditor, with Eugenie C. Scott, of *Not in Our Classrooms: Why Intelligent Design Is Wrong for Our Schools* (Beacon Press, forthcoming in 2006).

Kitzmiller et al. v. Dover Area School District et al. was the first legal case in which the constitutionality of teaching Intelligent Design—the latest incarnation of creationism—was tested. Presiding over the forty-day trial in the autumn of 2005 was Judge John E. Jones III, nominated to the federal bench by Senator Rick

Santorum—then a staunch supporter of Intelligent Design—and appointed by President George W. Bush, who, in August 2005, endorsed teaching Intelligent Design "so people can understand what the debate is about." Yet Jones, in the best tradition of constitutional jurisprudence, ruled decisively *against* the Dover Area School District's policy of misinforming students that "Darwin's Theory . . . is not a fact" and that "Intelligent design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin's view."

Jones's decision was scathing, both about the scientific credibility of Intelligent Design (which Jones wrote "is not science and cannot be adjudged a valid, accepted scientific theory as it has failed to publish in peer-reviewed journals, engage in research and testing, and gain acceptance in the scientific community") and about the behavior of the defendants (whom Jones castigated for their "breathtaking inanity" in adopting the objectionable policy). The

decision was issued on December 20, 2005, and to supporters of evolution education it came as a welcome, if premature, holiday gift. Fans of Intelligent Design were dismayed. Phyllis Schlafly—who as a lawyer ought to have known better—actually suggested that the principled decision constituted a betrayal of President Bush and his fundamentalist supporters: Jones, she complained, “stuck the knife in the backs of those who brought him to the dance.”

Commenting on the case before the trial, a local pastor who supported the school district’s policy explained, “We’ve been attacked by the intelligent, educated segment of the culture.” As if to continue the attack, the victory in *Kitzmiller* is evidently provoking a spate of books, of which *Intelligent Thought* is among the first. Edited by John Brockman, the literary impresario who specializes in popular science, *Intelligent Thought* contains essays by the dazzling likes of Richard Dawkins, Daniel C. Dennett, and Steven Pinker, as well as an excerpt from Judge Jones’s decision. The book is a pleasure to read: it is lively, compelling, and eloquent. The reputations of the contributors, together with the rapidity of its production and its modest price, ensure that it will be, deservedly, widely read.

A pair of essays engages the Intelligent Design movement directly and incisively, beginning with the lead essay by biologist Jerry A. Coyne, which confusingly shares its title (“Intelligent Design: The Faith That Dare Not Speak Its Name”) with his excellent review of the Intelligent Design textbook, *Of Pandas and People*, published in the August 22, 2005, issue of *The New Republic*. After carefully disentangling the ambiguities in which proponents constantly cloud it, Coyne concludes, “intelligent design, when it has any content at all, proves to be nothing more than a mishmash of Christian dogma and discredited science.” Similarly, philosopher Daniel C. Dennett devotes his essay, a version of which appeared in the August 28, 2005, issue of *The New York Times*, to exposing the methods whereby the movement seeks to obscure the vacuity of Intelligent Design. The value of these essays is heightened by their inclusion of bibliographic references, which are sadly absent from the bulk of the book.

After alluding to “the many dishonesties of the well-financed intelligent-design cabal,” zoologist Richard Dawkins addresses a central example. Although the proponents of Intelligent Design insist that science is capable of establishing the existence of a designer (by identifying biological systems that are too complex to have evolved without a designer’s assistance), they maintain that it is incapable of identifying the designer as God. The hope, of course, was to ensure that Intelligent Design would not be found to be a religious doctrine by a court. To no avail: Judge Jones noted in his decision that “no serious alternative to God as the designer has been proposed by members of the [Intelligent Design movement], including Defendants’ expert witnesses.” Independent of the legal point, Dawkins argues that appealing to a supernatural designer to explain biological complexity is of no avail, because such a designer would necessarily be at least as complex as the biological complexity it creates. Even if the supernatural designer’s complexity is allowed without explanation, he might have added, there remains the problem of specifying how it is supposed to be conveyed to the natural world.

Biologist Stuart A. Kauffman argues, perhaps not as innovatively as he thinks, that “intelligent design is, at best, hardly science, and that insofar as it can be construed as science, the evidence that has accumulated runs strongly against it.” His target is Michael Behe’s concept of irreducible complexity: as Behe originally defined it, a system is irreducibly complex if it is “composed of several interacting parts that contribute to the basic function . . . where the removal of any one of the parts causes the system to effectively cease functioning.” Behe argued that irreducible complexity entails unevolvability, but—as Kauffman suggests, if not with the utmost clarity—his argument neglected the possibility of the function of the system changing. Kauffman uses the outdated and misleading term *preadaptation* here; the modern term, coined by Stephen Jay Gould and Elisabeth Vrba, is *exaptation*. Whatever the term, the concept is indeed important in rebutting Behe’s argument, so much so that Judge Jones

used *exaptation* five times in his decision—probably the only judicial ruling ever to use the word. Kauffman also observes that the proponents of Intelligent Design overlook self-organization, where his own scientific work focuses, as a further source of complexity.

In his essay, physicist Seth Lloyd poses a series of amusing questions, “Just how smart is the universe? Smart enough to evolve stars, planets, and life without any external coaching? Clearly, the universe is gifted, but what is its IQ?” He reveals that these questions are less facetious than they appear. After calculating the computational capacity of the universe and investigating the implications for the origins of life and natural selection, Lloyd concludes, “Because of the universe’s information-processing power and diversity, it was virtually certain to hit upon life sooner or later.” In passing, he debunks Intelligent Design guru William Dembski’s misuse of the no-free-lunch theorems to argue that evolution is impossible. He then offers four free-lunch theorems, which together confirm his conclusion of the ability of the universe to produce life on its own, although it is perhaps less than helpful to be told in a footnote that the proof of those theorems is “a straightforward consequence of Kolmogorov’s theory of probability based on algorithmic information.”

Beneath the pseudoscientific veneer of Intelligent Design is a primal dread of the supposed consequences of evolution for morality, society, and religion. Such feelings are so common, in fact, that the “tree of evil”—with evolution as its root and various evils, real and imagined, ranging from abortion, crime, and pornography to racism, eugenics, and feminism, as its branches—is a common image in creationist literature. Anthropologist Scott Atran situates belief in Intelligent Design within his broader evolutionary theory of religion (presented in his book *In Gods We Trust*), citing the fear that evolution implies moral nihilism. It was incautious of him, however, to name the pope as a proponent of Intelligent Design: while signals from the Vatican have been mixed as of late, it cannot be without significance that during his Easter homily, the pope borrowed the

language of evolution to describe the Resurrection. Linguist Steven Pinker by and large agrees with Atran's diagnosis of belief in Intelligent Design and argues that, far from undermining morality, evolution helps us to understand its source, nature, and limitations.

A due sensitivity to the reasons that Intelligent Design is appealing is important, especially to those who are likely to encounter creationists. When confronted by a pair of creationist students, physicist Leonard Susskind angrily insisted that the supernatural was completely abolished by the outcomes of modern science. "The result," he reports in his contribution, "was completely predictable: recriminations, and two students hostile to science." Since then, prompted not only by the desire not to offend but also by his ideals of intellectual honesty, Susskind adopted a different approach. Asked by a creationist student whether he believes in God, he answered, "No, I personally don't. But I have numerous friends—eminent scientists—who do believe that an intelligence must have been involved in creation." He added, importantly, that he and his believing friends agree on the nature of science, in particular its incapacity to consider the supernatural as providing potential explanations, which is precisely what the Intelligent Design movement refuses to acknowledge.

A few of the authors take Intelligent Design as a springboard for presenting their own extensions of evolutionary thought. Psychologist Nicholas Humphrey sketches his evolutionary account of consciousness, which is presented more fully in its latest iteration in his new book, *Seeing Red*. As a foil, he offers and rebuts a version of the argument for a designer centered not on the traditional examples, the vertebrate eye and the bacterial flagellum, but on consciousness. He expresses surprise at the reluctance of proponents of Intelligent Design to use the argument, wondering if "they are shy of arguing . . . for supernatural design?" They are not, at least to friendly audiences. Rather, they realize that consciousness is not so central a topic of elementary and secondary science education as evolution is (or ought to be), and so it is not so urgent for them to oppose naturalistic accounts of the mind as it is for them to

oppose naturalistic accounts of life. Expect the proponents of Intelligent Design to become increasingly vociferous about consciousness as neuroscience begins to enter the curriculum.

With a nod to Charles Sanders Peirce's speculations about the evolution of the laws of nature themselves, physicist Lee Smolin describes his Darwinian approach to cosmology. There are about twenty free parameters in the standard model of particle physics and about fifteen in cosmology, he explains; the values of those parameters are not determined by the theory, but ascertained by experiment. It is vanishingly improbable for any randomly selected set of values for these parameters to correspond to what Smolin aptly calls a biofriendly universe. How then to explain the improbable biofriendliness of the universe? Smolin identifies three classes of explanation: appealing to a divine creator, asserting the mathematical necessity of biofriendly values, and assuming the existence of multiple universes.

The mere assumption of multiple universes, however, is not testable, Smolin argues. But if a Darwinian model is adopted, wherein universes reproduce themselves, with their progeny varying randomly in their values for the parameters and the fecundity of a given universe depending on those values, a testable version of the multiverse hypothesis results. As interesting as it is to see evolutionary principles applied in a cosmological context, Smolin seems to take a number of questionable assumptions for granted, particularly the presupposition that any judgments about the probability of possible values for the parameters are meaningful.

A number of contributors write not primarily on Intelligent Design but on their own specialties instead. Beginning with his team's discovery at Herto in Ethiopia of a human cranium from about 155,000 years ago, paleoanthropologist Tim D. White offers a review of the history of and evidence for human evolution (with a passing swipe at creationists who squabbled about whether the Herto skull was human or ancient—it could not, of course, be both, according to them). Paleontologist Neil H. Shubin discusses the background, discovery, and significance of the fossil

Tiktaalik roseae, the so-called *fishapod* that illuminates the fish-to-tetrapod transition. Importantly, and in contrast with Intelligent Design's scientific sterility, the discovery of *T. roseae* demonstrated evolution's predictive capacity—Shubin and his colleagues knew just where to look in the Canadian North. Historian of science Frank J. Sulloway provides a detailed and fascinating narrative of how Darwin came to reject the Intelligent Design analog of his day, embodied in William Paley's *Natural Theology*, on the basis of the biological and paleontological evidence.

As her essay's title, "Designing Words," suggests, physicist Lisa Randall is concerned with the confusions provoked by various ambiguities—"evolution" as the fact of common descent versus "evolution" as the processes by which evolution occurs; "theory" in its scientific sense of a system for explaining natural phenomena versus "theory" in its vernacular sense as a guess or a hunch; "observation" in the sense of direct sensory contact with the world versus "observation" in the sense of contact mediated by a complex web of theory. Not concerned solely with the linguistic niceties, she takes pains to emphasize the depth and breadth of the evidence for evolution, to acknowledge the fact that evolution—like any scientific theory—is incomplete, and to insist on the autonomy of science with respect to religion. In a better world, it would be unnecessary to rehearse such platitudes, but at least Randall manages to do so gracefully.

The final pair of essays, by evolutionary psychologist Marc D. Hauser and paleontologist Scott D. Sampson, addresses educational issues. Sampson suggests, I think implausibly, that it is a conceptual divorce between ecology and evolution that is responsible for the widespread failure to understand evolution. His call for "a seamless eco-evolutionary approach" to biology education, however, is worth considering. Hauser inveighs against a touchy-feely approach to education in which "a wholesale blurring of disciplinary boundaries" is allowed and "intuition, speculation, opinion, and first-person or anecdotal experience" are rampant, apparently under the misapprehension that he is thereby opposing the Intelligent

Design movement. In fact, creationists tend to be conservative, even reactionary, in their pedagogy, as a perusal of *Of Pandas and People*, for example, reveals. His alternative, in which every science course would be complemented by a course on the history of that particular science and a course on its relation to the arts and humanities, is appealing but utopian.

To be sure, *Intelligent Thought* is neither a comprehensive refutation

of the scientific claims of Intelligent Design (for such a volume, see Matt Young and Taner Edis's anthology, *Why Intelligent Design Fails*) nor a definitive exposé of the unsavory tactics of its proponents (for that, see Barbara Forrest and Paul R. Gross's *Creationism's Trojan Horse*). Still less is it a complete history of the *Kitzmiller* case, of which there are reportedly a number in the writing. Think of it instead as a chance to eavesdrop on a diverse, articulate,

thoughtful group of people as they chat about a variety of subjects brought to their minds by the defeat of Intelligent Design in the *Kitzmiller* trial. (No doubt, it's those notorious troublemakers again: the intelligent, educated segment of the culture.) And take it too as a call for action: although the *Kitzmiller* decision was a defeat for creationism, it was not a lethal blow, and the need to defend the teaching of evolution in the public schools persists. **ff**

WHY WE DON'T NEED SUPERMAN



William Orem

Superman Returns, directed by Bryan Singer (U.S.: Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc., 2006). 154 minutes.

The red and blue champion presented in *Superman Returns* differs enough from the character portrayed so endearingly by Christopher Reeve in the 1970s that adult members of the audience may feel deceived. The costume is the same, if oddly rubberized; the spit-curl and corn-fed good looks are still present, reminding us that what cartoonists Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster really invented was a projection of American idealism, a kind of Paul Bunyan for the Sputnik age. But something is different here. Where the man of steel once stood for truth and justice, he now is invested with creepy spiritual meaning.

In short, this Superman is Jesus. Or, rather, he is Christ: the supernaturally empowered spirit-person that was eventually grafted onto the carpenter-from-Nazareth figure to produce the Messiah. It's hard to do a subtle Christ symbol—even Hemingway stumbled on it when he wrote

William Orem is a freelance writer based in Waltham, Massachusetts.

The Old Man and the Sea—but Brian Singer's directorial cues to Superman's new secret identity are obvious, even crude. Things first get funny when a bitter Lois Lane tells Superman he never should have returned to Earth because "We don't need a savior." With benevolent patience, he carries her up above the globe to instruct her in the error of such thinking. We may think we don't need a savior; this Superman tells all of us, but he hears the whole world crying out for one.

This interaction is vaguely astonishing in a film purportedly about a comic-book hero. The romantic flight-over-Metropolis sequence from the 1978 film is redacted into an emotionless, transcendent register that overwrites the whole previous history like a new religion reinscribing its origins. All the charm, sexual tension, and plain fun of Richard Donner's adaptation is gone. Instead we have preaching in tights.

Nor does Singer drop the comparison there. After being beaten by thugs in a

scene popped straight from Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, this bleeding, sweating Man of Steel lifts the sins of the world and casts them away into space. Falling backward, he literally assumes the posture of the Crucified One—this is perhaps for the slow learners in the audience—before being taken through a death scene, an empty tomb scene, and a thickly laid on Easter sequence. "The Son becomes the Father, the Father becomes the Son," the character formerly known as Superman intones before ascending to the heavens.

I left *Superman Returns* with the distinct feeling of having been tricked into a propaganda piece, something cowritten by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Falwell. And as the 747s fall and the skyscrapers totter, the political implications of such a rewrite come perilously close to the surface. Are we actually being told that the reason our cities are endangered is that our culture is *too* secular?

Other gods, god-men, and sacrificial victims make their appearances in *Superman Returns* as well. There is a rather beautifully rendered homage to Atlas; both Clark Kent and Lex Luthor are rendered as Oedipus, seen through pure and repulsive lenses. More loudly, Luthor is cast as Prometheus, stealing crystals from the snowy Fortress of Solitude and wreaking havoc with the divine power they hold.

But with all the myths and muscle competing for space in Singer's strangely heavy fluff, one position is given no quarter. In despair over being Left Behind, the new Lois Lane has written an article titled *Why We Don't Need Superman*. The piece won a Pulitzer; why, we aren't told, but presumably for advocating some kind of ethic of self-

reliance. Like the female lead from a screwball comedy, self-asserting Lane must go through a developmental arc in which she admits that, indeed, she does need a savior. We see her near the end of this two-and-one-half-hour opus weeping over her retraction.

I don't need a savior. This is fortunate, as there aren't any. The world is full, of course, of purported saviors, from the political and economic type to straight-forward magicians and mountebanks. From Muhammad to Mao, saviors are both common and false. Too often, they are also deadly.

What I do need are heroes. Heroes do not stand over us and offer an ersatz significance to our lives. Heroes do not bring magical fixes that come at the price of dependency. Heroes serve as models; they embody the best that is available to human nature. They exemplify courage, integrity, honesty, wisdom. In looking at them, we see what we might become.

My heroes are such people as Carl Sagan, for his wisdom; Martin Luther King, for his courage; Rosa Parks, for her integrity. I am always looking for more.

Superman used to be a hero. He did what was right because it was right; he modeled strength wedded to responsibility. For ten-year-old boys, he was a vision of personal efficacy; for their fathers, a reminder of how being good makes a man powerful. He was never meant to be a savior. Superman never bled and suffered and became one with the father. He was about the next generation learning how to grow up well, not learning how to submit.

America is choking on a surfeit of savior mentality. It could use a true, old-fashioned hero. Someone like the real Superman. **fi**

(**Letters** *cont'd.* from p. 11)

with the third-world and anticolonialist politics of, say, Franz Fanon."

"Leftists," huh? He makes a ludicrous blanket statement that doesn't accord with any version of reality with which I'm acquainted. I know quite a few liberals/progressives/leftists, and not one of them admires bin Laden or considers him anything but a fanatical murderer. If Hitchens hangs out with these kind of leftists, he's living in a very rarefied world indeed.

Hitchens then expends paragraph after paragraph explaining, in ringing tones, why we should despise bin Laden. Then he adds insult to injury by suggesting that the entire antiwar movement considers the victims of Islamic terrorism "powerful wrongdoers." Again, what planet is Hitchens living on?

It was my impression that FREE INQUIRY subscribes to a manifesto that would decry the innocent deaths of thousands of civilians in an unprovoked invasion of a country that had nothing to do with the September 11, 2001, attacks. Every current indicator shows that the invasion has been an unmitigated disaster. Yet you're letting a man like Hitchens tell your readers—the majority of whom, I venture to submit, are against the current military action—that anyone who objects to the "war" is a worshiper of bin Laden and terrorism.

I, for one, refuse to be subjected to this sort of fanatical rhetoric in a magazine I pay good money for. I believe this is my last issue. I certainly won't mourn loss of my subscription.

Kathleen Tagstrom
Albuquerque, New Mexico

I am a liberal, "progressive," atheist humanist, so, for the last two decades, I have been alternately elated and appalled by the writings of Christopher Hitchens. His exposé of Mother Theresa, stalwart support for Salman Rushdie, and thoughtful analysis of Thomas Jefferson's place in American history are all vital contributions to freethought. On the other hand, his support for the incompetent, evangelical, anti-intellectual boob in the White House, who stands for everything to which Hitchens has been or ought to be opposed, leaves me both sad and perplexed. His recent piece, "Vice Verso," invokes a different, reflective response, though. Hitchens shows us in the current antiwar movement the need to be very careful not to make oversimplifications.

It is not that a book such as *The Statements of Osama bin Laden* should not be published. Like *Mein Kampf* and other odious works of anti-humanity, this book needs to be available to keep straight the historical record. Hitchens is right, however, that those of us on the Left should not in a misguided attempt to appear "fair" approve or appear to approve of either bin Laden or his ideas. Lawrence's and Scheuer's statements in the introduction to the book serve only one purpose—to demonstrate to right-wing fearmongers such as Ann Coulter and Rush Limbaugh that they are correct, that the antiwar Left is also anti-America and pro-terrorist. We on the Left must not oversimplify; we must not assume that all those opposed to the abhorrent Bush regime are therefore

"good" in some way because of their opposition. Hitchens is right. Osama bin Laden is loathsome; the cause he stands for is abominable. I speak out here for what I believe the majority of people the antiwar movement also believe but do not make clear enough, both that the Iraq war was wrong from the beginning and the Islamic terrorists are "stupid and wicked."

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